ABSTRACT

Benjamin Britten and Christianity

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This thesis charts the significance of the topic of Christianity in the dramaturgy of Britten's operas. In light of recent research, it takes an essentially negative view of Britten's relationship with the religious orthodoxy of his day, a view consistent with Britten's own. However, it will be demonstrated that a dialectic with the Christian element is embodied in a majority of Britten's operatic dramaturgies. This is, in part, connected to the established theme of Britten's obsession with the corruption of innocence by experience: it is rooted in the association of a 'clear, untroubled' Christian belief with the innocence of a childhood dominated by his religious mother; the experience of adult life with Pears after the death of his parents; the decisive impact of W.H. Auden, who primarily effected the transition between these two worlds.

It will be shown how these factors influenced the shaping of the libretti of his operas. It will also be shown how the Christian dialectic, manifesting itself most powerfully and painfully in the *War Requiem* and three parables for Church performance of the 1960s, is one of a number of discretely autonomous strata that form the unique admixture of Britten's aesthetic and artistic personality.

It will be demonstrated, in conclusion, that in art as in life, the contingencies Britten imposed upon the Christian element are ultimately displaced by other 'non-Christian' elements related to the Classical paradigm.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND CHRISTIANITY

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Footnote references are cited in full in the bibliography. Clarifying bracketed journal initials appear where multi-publications in any year occur. Authors are related to Symposia, where appropriate, and the reader is referred to the publication for further details.

Act and scene references are referred to in the briefest form, e.g. I.1 (Act I, scene 1 etc.). Figure references are defined: e.g. Fig. $^{5}7$ (5 bars before figure 7) Fig. 5^{7} (7 bars after figure 5) etc. Unless otherwise stated, all musical references are to the standard sources. Keys and intervals are capitalised when major (e.g. C, M3 = C major, major third) and lower case when minor (e.g. c, m3 = c minor, minor third).

Musical examples intersperse the text and scanned examples are given whole pages where necessary to ensure chronological flow.

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Stephen Arthur Allen (Dec. 2002)

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Chapter 1: Britten and Christianity, from childhood to *Paul Bunyan* (1941)

One of the most significant events in the life of Benjamin Britten was his break in the mid-1930s with the religion of his mother and of his own childhood and early youth. Against 'the religious background of my conscience', combined with a growing idealised nostalgia for his own childhood, Britten's adoption of a new spiritual–intellectual trajectory breaking with Biblical morality had a profound effect on the nature of his art.[1] The works examined in the present thesis document an artistic experience of an acutely felt duality: Britten's experience was that of a guilty adult against the background of an internalised innocent child. This dualistic experience resulted in a need to re-engage with some kind of Christian element in his work, often connected with the exploration of modes of redemption. The degree of Britten's creative juxtaposition of tensions between sacred and secular elements can be seen to be more personal than merely his response to living in a nominally 'Christian' society.

In the present thesis the nature of Britten's relationship to Christianity as revealed in his operatic dramas will be dealt with in a systematic way for the first time. The influence of W. H. Auden on Britten is so seminal, especially to the period of Britten's break with religion, that the Auden–Britten collaborations *Our Hunting Fathers* (1936, a song-cycle) and the

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[1] Britten (Mitchell–Reed 1991:1058).

operetta *Paul Bunyan* (1941), composed during Britten's American Period (1939–42), will be considered the touchstone works of this investigation.

The present chapter will commence with a brief Scriptural model of the theme of Christian salvation, which will subsequently be seen to accord with doctrine Britten received throughout his own childhood and early manhood (i.e. up to his early twenties), as will be demonstrated by examining *Daily Light*, a Biblical digest that the young Britten used. Britten's positive early experience of Christianity, manifested in a number of letters and diary entries related to sermons and religious content in his early compositions up to *Fathers*, will be identified. The new trajectory opened up by Auden in *Fathers* and *Bunyan* will then be discussed as an introduction to the themes to be examined throughout the thesis.

1. The theme of salvation

The Christian position taken for critical purposes in the present thesis is the traditional one in which personal confession and repentance of sin demonstrates a loving response to the grace manifested in the Gospel. This response, grounded in a (Trinitarian) belief in the Divine person of Christ (i.e. his life, death, burial and resurrection), leads to eternal salvation. Britten's diaries and letters, combined with the tensions of his operatic dramas, indicate that this system was of significance to him on some level. It was a spiritual ingredient through which he could address his audience, a stated

aim behind his purpose in creation.[2] Britten's recognition of himself and others as fundamentally spiritual beings is an important context in which to understand his oft-stated view of music as a language by which one could 'communicate ideas' (i.e. not just feelings and emotions):[3]

> Like the actual world, incidentally, the spirit world contains bad as well as good.[4]

The central thrust of this thesis demonstrates how Britten sought to create an alternate 'grace', through the development of his musical aesthetic.[5] This aesthetic was modelled on, but ultimately very different to, the saving response to grace through repentance proposed by the doctrines of Biblical Christianity, which Britten later confessed he had rejected:

> Britten replied that he was certainly a Christian in his music Although he could not accept church doctrine, he believed in a God and a destiny.[6]

A close friend of Britten's made an idiosyncratic argument for the actual substitution of Christian grace by a musical grace during the period Britten was working on *War Requiem*.[7]

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[2] Britten 1964/78:17–18.

[3] Britten (Palmer 1984:94); also (*L*) 1942:138; (*ON*) 1967:16 and Nordoff–Robbins 1971:9, where Britten's advocacy of musical communication bound up with common musical elements (scales, intervals, keys etc.) is made abundantly clear.

[4] Britten (*O*) 1960:15. App. 2.

[5] Wagner's notion of 'Bühnenweihfestspiel', particularly referring to *Parsifal* and the idea of a quasi-religious consecration on stage combining Christian symbolism, legend, erotic and mystical elements and suffering, is Britten's heritage here. Britten's comments on *Parsifal* in his diary entries cited below (main text) are telling in this regard. See Whittall 1974:299 on Wagner's and Britten's shared view of Christianity as essentially 'anti-art'.

[6] Perahia (Blyth 1981:172). Britten's aesthetic quest aligns itself with David's providing King Saul with relief from an evil spirit by playing his harp (1 Samuel 16:14–23, i.e. Saul was only freed in the immediate aftermath of David's playing, made clear by his later attempts to kill David). Such 'temporary salvation' plays an important role for Vere in *Billy Budd*.

[7] Robertson 1961:246–50.

Britten's discovery of Auden in 1935 and their collaboration on *Fathers* in 1936 occurred during a period in which Britten became increasingly determined to break with Biblical paradigms.[8] Yet Britten's music and life was given momentum in a new direction precisely by a genuine moral dilemma separating him from the 'clear, unclouded faith of his childhood' with its institutional and Biblical support (not necessarily the same thing, distinctions proving critical especially from *War Requiem* on).[9]

2. Religious foundations: Britten's early belief system and later break with 'traditional' religion

Britten's childhood and early manhood reveal a consistent engagement with conventional modes of Christianity. To an older generation this fact may have been taken for granted: in England throughout the early half of the previous century one was essentially considered 'born a member of the Church of England', if only nominally. In Britten's case it appears that his mother played the essential role in shaping his religious interest and ideas. However, a number of documents demonstrate that during his youth, religion meant more to Britten than mere convention. In the front fly page of his 1928 diary, he inscribed his confirmation dedication:

> My duty towards god is to believe in him, to fear him, and to love him, with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and with all my strength. To worship him, to give him thanks, to put my whole trust in

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[8] From their first meeting Pears claims that he was not sure Britten 'would really have called himself Christian' (cited Carpenter 1992:112–13). For 'Judgement' and 'judgement rhetoric' in Britten, see Mitchell (Banks 1996/2000:151–65) and Rupprecht 2001:283 respectively.
[9] Hussey 1977.

> him, to call upon him, to know his Holy name & his word, and to serve him truly all the days of my life.[10]

The accentuated significance of Britten's formative experiences on his later life and music has been noted:

> Ben took childhood very seriously. [...] It was part of the whole story.[11]

> [Britten] certainly grew up. But he did not discard his childhood so much as preserve it intact within him, and protect and conserve it throughout his adult life.[12]

Britten's stated 'faith in the subconscious, that it's going to direct one rightly' is significant in these respects:

> Music is largely a matter of communication, and if it is expressed in an entirely new language, naturally we have difficulty understanding it. But if the language has evolved naturally, even if the ideas expressed are new, we shall be more likely to be able to follow – guided by references, conscious or unconscious.[13]

'Corrupted innocence' is a universally acknowledged Britten theme.[14] However, this is deemed an unsatisfactory and incomplete interpretation of a central aspect of Britten's work engaging with Christian themes and ideas:

> To describe this central experience [of Christ's Incarnation and Passion in Britten's music, 'simultaneously but in different perspectives'] as the opposition of 'innocence' and 'experience' would be to oversimplify and to ignore the issue of how they may be reconciled. [...] To trace [this central experience] is not to diminish Britten's stature, but to define it.[15]

> In his moral attitudes, [Britten] was Low Church, and therefore inclined to be puritanical. [...] I think the key to his music lies in his

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[10] Unpublished (Britten–Pears Library). At the top of this page Britten wrote, '"Pray" said the dying wit [?] to the doctors, "Pray."' Britten was confirmed into the Anglican Church at 3 p.m., 23 Mar. 1928.
[11] Pears 1978:10.
[12] Mitchell–Reed 1991:26.
[13] Britten (Palmer 1984:91) and 1967 (*ON*):16.
[14] Palmer 1984:68 *et seq.* summarises this theme.
[15] Garvie 1970:59–61.

> moral point of view combined with his craving for lost innocence brought on by his increasing disillusionment with man.[16]

The range of religious music in Britten's unpublished juvenilia reflects his religious interest as a youth.[17] There are also a number of unpublished religious works dating from Britten's American Period.[18] This religious engagement extends significantly in almost every genre of Britten's published *oeuvre*. The incomplete series of cantatas Britten was working on at the time of his death in 1976 indicate his continued need to include a Christian element in his work.[19]

Britten's diary entries reveal not only a consistent pattern of church attendance, but also a tissue of commentary describing personal responses to sermons:

Table 1: Britten's unpublished diary entries related to church attendance and sermons[20]

1928:
9 April: '[I am the] Only one at church.'

14 October: '[Sermon] quite nice.'

18 November: 'v.g. sermon'

1929:
31 March: 'At last I can go [back to church after long illness].'

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[16] Pears (Blyth 1981:22–23).
[17] Manuscripts on Microfilm 63b (Britten–Pears Library). In addition to works listed in Evans *et al.* 1987:2–23: *Hominibus bonae voluntatis* for voice and piano (1925, unfinished); *Kyrie eleison* for voice and piano (1925, unfinished); Fugue for piano [and chorus] 'Thus saith the Lord' (1925, unfinished); Mass in e, for soloists, chorus and orchestra (1925/6).
[18] Evans *et al.* 1987:49–50.
[19] The author investigated the source materials and draft libretti of the Nativity cycle for Pimlico School (Britten–Pears Library).
[20] Published: *1928*: 21 and 23 Sept. *1931*: 25 Jan., 8 and 22 Mar., 12 and 26 July, 15 and 22 Nov. and 25 Dec. *1932*: 7 and 14 Feb., 6 and 20 Mar., 31 July, 7 Aug., 25 Dec. (Mitchell–Reed 1991).

7 April: 'striking and moving sermon.'

2 May: 'Marvellous sermon on Faith & Love.'

23 June: 'Bishop R. preached a very fine sermon; "Creation cranes forward its neck awaiting the sons of God to come into sight." [Cf. Romans 8:19] [...] He concluded the sermon with a resumé of Parsival [*sic*]; in which he shows that Parsival is an example of a son of God. A magnificent sermon.'

4 August: 'beautiful sermon [...] on "contentment".'

11 August: 'marvellous sermon [...] on Church & criticising it.'

13 October: Rev'd Hall 'preaches one of the most glorious & inspiring & moving sermons [...] that I have ever heard.'

8 December: 'He [?Canon Stone] quite impressed me w. his idea of God.'

1930:
12 January: 'magnificent sermon (clever & inspired).'

11 February: '["The Church's one Foundation" is the] most glorious of Hymns.'

16 February: 'Good sermon by Rev. A. L. Worth on "The Inequality of the World".'

27 April: 'quite nice sermon by Mr. Palmer on "Come to Church" Sunday. He gave us few reasons for doing it – not that we need them much, for most of us have our own.'

22 June: [Bishop of Ripon] 'very nice sermon on Faith.'

26 October: 'Go to St Pauls (?) Paddington to service. [...] Hear Bishop of Westminster, v. good.'

16 November: 'to Westminster Cathedral (R.C.) for High Mass or something at 10.30. [...] The service is very bewildering, but the music absolutely superb, & also the choir.'

1932:
25 March: 'v. fine preacher Mr. Turmstall.'

19 June: 'Rev. W. H. Elliot who preaches a remarkable sermon.'

Britten's later statement, 'The element of the preacher is what makes Auden very valuable', and the overt 'preachy' tone of *The Rape of Lucretia* and the three Church Parables of the 1960s is particularly striking given his close early engagement with sermons and preaching.[21] This preaching impulse may also lie behind Britten's need to 'Christianise' many of his operas and the propagandist tone some have identified in *Owen Wingrave*.

Britten's earliest exposure to the music of any kind of liturgy was the hymn-based low-church services at St. John's, Lowestoft, which he had attended as a child with his mother:

> Ben's mother was quite devout, and quite musical as well. But in Lowestoft, when he was a child, the church was rather drab, both aesthetically and musically. The choir was not very good and the hymns were deplorable. He suffered there, quite a lot, yet his attitude toward the whole heritage of the music of the church – and to church architecture as well – had been very close. [...]
>
> When something is really in your bones, even when put there against your will, it's very difficult to get rid of it – and I don't know if Ben wanted to. Ben was not an abstract person; he was very human, and sensitive to associations. He loved the great hymns, and they are prominently represented.[22]

The lists of hymns Britten annotated in the back fly of his childhood hymnal is an important source in indicating his selection of hymns at an earlier stage of his life, melodies that influenced later choices in his work.[23]

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[21] Britten (*ON*) 1969:9–11.

[22] Pears 1978:15. Also [Beth] Britten 1986:65.

[23] Unpublished. *The Public School Hymn Book with Tunes* (Novello, undated). Inscribed 'Sept. 21st 1928. Benjamin Britten, Fairfield, Holt' (Britten–Pears Library).

The left and right-hand columns indicate favoured melodies and texts respectively:

Table 2: Britten's list of hymns (1928)

good [hymn tunes]	[Texts]
2. ['Tallis' Canon' as used in *Noye's Fludde*]	2
4. [Ratisbon: 'Christ, whose glory']	8
	11 ['London New', as used in *Saint Nicolas*]
8 (i) ['Adesto Sancta Trinitas'/Chartres]	12
13 ['Illsle'y/J. Bishop: 'Sweet is the breath']	13
16 ['St Magnus'/Clarke: 'This is the day']	
22 ['Tallis' Canon' (as above): 'Glory to Thee']	
23 ['Ar hyd y nos'/'All through the night']	
31 (2) [Illsley/J. Bishop, text: 'Te lucis ante-terminum' as used in *Curlew River* and, translated, *Grimes* (II.1)]	
'O God our help in ages past' ['St Anne']	
'Hail, Festival days'	
'All people that on earth do dwell' ['Old Hundredth', as used in *Saint Nicolas*]	
'Now thank we all our God' ['Nun danket']	
'When I survey the wondrous Cross' ['Rockingham']	
'Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire' ['Veni Creator'/T. Attwood, not the version used by Mahler (Eighth Symphony) and Britten in *The World of the Spirit*]	
'He who would valiant be' [Monk's Gate]	

Britten's 'realizations' of hymns throughout his career, in the interaction of found melodies and his own music, further reflects his adult interest in the music of his childhood.[24]

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[24] Whittall (Reed 1995:290–98).

Britten's earliest experience of a high service, including the use of plainsong, is noted in his letter to his father and mother on 21 September 1928:

> At 9.30 we went into Chapel to a sort of glorified Morning Prayer. It is a high service, anyhow they sing plainsong, and in the Creed turn to the East and bow and nod etc. There is a funny little chaplain, he seems rather nice.[25]

The tension between Britten's low-church upbringing with his mother and the character of chapel services at Greshams would have been acute, as he indicates here. (As in his own case as an adult, Britten's father was agnostic, and not a churchgoer.[26]) Greshams was Britten's first recorded experience of plainsong, a form of music that was to become of increasing significance to him. Britten similarly reacted against the 'high style' as demonstrated in his diaries (see also 16 November 1930 above):

> 11am St. Marks, North Audley St. [...] V. nice service altho it is too high for my liking.[27]

Given Britten's preservation of his childhood values into adult life on some level, his aversion to the high church liturgical manner suggests a certain ambiguity in his use of high liturgical forms and texts in his later works. This ambiguity extends to the overt conflict between the Latin Catholic Requiem

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[25] Mitchell–Reed 1991:93–95. See also Elliott 1985:44–72. In addition to *The Public School Hymn Book* noted above, *A Manual of Plainsong for Divine Service* was used in Gresham services (Briggs–Frere 1902). Britten's copy is similarly inscribed 'Sept. 21st 1928/ E. Benjamin Britten/Fairfield/Holt' (Britten–Pears Library).

[26] Beth Welford [*née* Britten] (Blyth 1981:26) and [Beth] Britten 1986:76.

[27] Mitchell–Reed 1991:181. However it should be noted that in an unpublished later diary entry, 19 Jan. 1937, Britten stated 'it wouldn't take much to turn me R[oman]. C[atholic].' Also Britten (cited Carpenter 1992:79–80).

sequence and the Wilfred Owen poems in *War Requiem* and, more subtly, the use of ritual and liturgically derived materials in the Church Parables.

Britten's letters to his mother and a diary entry demonstrate that at least between 22 September 1928 and 7 February 1931 he possessed and (apparently) regularly read an anthology of Scriptures. This was *Daily Light on the Daily Path: A Devotional Text-Book For Every Day of the Year*:

> I did feel ['funny' [crossed-out]] horrible when I went to bed last-night, but wasn't the Daily Light wonderful, just the one for me!
>
> But tho' the letter goes I still think of you, every second of my life, and especially when I read my Daily Light, and realize that you will be reading it too.
>
> I expect you will all be sitting up in 'heaven'. How I wish I could be with you; it would indeed be 'heaven' for me if I could be with you. [...] I shall read the Daily Light and think of you doing it also. I must just peep now and see what it's about – it is very comforting, and it has done me good to read it.[28]

> I work all afternoon & after tea at choral piece – merely choosing words for 2nd half. I eventually select some (rather unsatisfactory). Read through whole of Psalms, & Daily Light.[29]

It is unfortunate that Britten's copy of *Daily Light* has not yet surfaced at the Britten Archive.[30] However, the author has procured an edition typical of the kind Britten and his mother used.[31] The book is essentially a digest thematically arranged so that various fragments of Scripture are woven into a

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[28] Mitchell–Reed 1991:96, 103, 110. 'Heaven' was the family name for the upstairs drawing room. The ground floor was reserved for Mr. Britten's dental practice (Carpenter 1992:3–4).
[29] Unpublished, 7 Feb. 1931 (Britten–Pears Library). The work is *Christ's Nativity*. The author thanks Dr. Jenny Doctor and Miss Anne Surfling for bringing this diary entry to his notice.
[30] The author is grateful to the Britten–Pears Library who endeavoured to trace Britten's copy in August 2000.
[31] New York 1906.

tapestry of connected text.[32] Many Scriptural fragments are repeated on different days serving in several theological and doctrinal contexts. From this it is possible to suggest that although we have no specific knowledge of what Britten may have been taught Biblically via his exposure to organized religion, *Daily Light* represents something approximating an early 'Britten Bible.'[33] This is significant given Britten's unusual sensitivity to the written word via the consistent manifestation of specifically Christian-related materials and themes in the texts he chose to set:

> In many oratorios, of course, where the words come from the liturgy or the Bible the composer has the greatest possible inspiration for his music[34]

Recent research has also indicated the importance of Britten's early setting of Biblical texts during his church-going years, which 'undoubtedly left its mark on the later work' through 'an identifiable compositional mode', the subject of the present thesis.[35]

Clearly *Daily Light* gave Britten a bond with his mother whom he missed intensely during his time away at school. However there is sufficient evidence that the readings meant something personally to Britten independently of any sense of obligation to his mother and that he drew a certain spiritual sustenance from them. This kind of Scriptural need was

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[32] The author's analysis of *Daily Light* included identification of the implied daily themes (e.g. 'faith', 'repentance', 'grace' etc.) and re-locating the various Scriptural fragments into original chronological order to observe balance and repetition (i.e. the kind of Scriptural exposure Britten may have encountered).

[33] A comprehensive list of Bibles and religious books, owned by Britten and examined by the author, is now found on the Britten–Pears Library website.

[34] Britten (Herbert 1979/89:117).

[35] Mitchell (Cooke 1999:190).

probably exacerbated by his alien encounter with the high liturgy of the Gresham Chapel services, and underpins a distinction between Biblical faith and institutional observances. Such distinctions are important to later Britten where a passive–aggressive stance towards Biblical faith as distinct from any institutional type can be discerned.

Likewise, Britten's comments in his diaries on the sermons heard throughout his youth indicate an independent engagement and relevance. This sense of personal meaning is reinforced by isolated comments scattered throughout the diary entries of the Gresham period:

> Ordinary work all day. I struggle over it somehow, how I don't know, except that God was helping me.[36]

> [In the context of Britten's losing marks in his school work:] yet God knows (I speak absolutely reverently) that I am doing my utmost best. [...] Oh God, how will this end?[37]

> Music is the only thing – what I should do without it, God only knows.[38]

The pairing of Music and God in this last statement is prophetic of his later reported statement 'I am coming to feel more and more that all my music must be written to the glory of God.'[39] However, as will be shown, Britten's apprehension of God was critically modified during the interim period between both statements (i.e. increasingly shifted, after 1936, to a view filtered through a Classical paradigm in which unrepentant sin can be admitted and,

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[36] Unpublished, 19 June 1929 (Britten–Pears Library).
[37] Unpublished, 18 Feb. 1930 (Britten–Pears Library).
[38] Unpublished, 23 Feb. 1930 (Britten–Pears Library).
[39] Britten (cited Hussey 1977).

aesthetically, 'blessed'), as indicated by his own vague comments, e.g. 'I am a great believer in "Fate" or "God" or what-you-will.'[40]

On 2 June 1935 Britten went with his mother to a Christian Science service in Kensington: 'V. lovely new building – and some of the service v. impressive & simple, but I cannot accept the creed I'm afraid.'[41] The question of 'creeds' will be shown to be particularly significant to the catastrophic moment of *Grimes* (II.1, Figs. 16–18) and to Owen's pacifist *credo* in *Wingrave* (II.1, Figs. 246–60).

As Britten felt the influence of Auden more strongly after July 1935, altercations between the composer and his mother emerged over the subject of the incompatibility of communism and religion:[42]

> No one goes to Church early [...] subject dropped like lead. Mum goes at 11.30 to her C[hristian].S[cience]. meeting tho.[43]

A letter to his brother Robert indicates that at the time of this altercation Britten was already working on *Fathers*, the work that his mother was to find so troubling.[44]

3. Britten, Bridge, Auden, religion and pacifism

Whatever Britten's relationship to any creed in June 1935, the subsequent cathartic influence of W. H. Auden from the time of their first meeting on 5

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[40] Mitchell–Reed 1991:998.
[41] Unpublished(Britten–Pears Library).
[42] Mitchell–Reed 1991:65, fn. 18.
[43] Unpublished, 12 April 1936 (Britten–Pears Library).
[44] Mitchell–Reed 1991:414 also Carpenter 1992:82; 86.

July marked the beginning of distinct signs of Britten's pulling away from established religious institutions.[45] His composition teacher and principal mentor from 1928 to 1939, Frank Bridge, appears to have also been involved in shaping Britten's formative ideas. Britten wrote on 3 February, six months before meeting Auden, 'Dinner at Bridges & much very serious & interesting argument (civilization – war via (of course) religion).'[46] After befriending Auden he wrote on 31 December 1936 of the Spanish Civil War and the 'vile hypocracy [*sic*] of State & Church.'[47] These are the first occasions the themes of civilization, war, hypocrisy and religion are connected in Britten's writing, a point with obvious relevance to his ensuing *oeuvre*, although the '(of course)' in 1935 indicates that he had previously discussed such connections, at least with the Bridges.

While these provisional 'rifts' with the Church were beginning to accelerate, Britten wrote in his diary on 19 April 1936, the year before the death of his mother and his final rupture with established religion:

> Listen to Stravinsky's Symphonie de psaumes (of which I have recently got the small score) [...] & in the evening we hear chunks of Parsifal under Wood from Queen's Hall (BBC). It is interesting to compare the attitudes of the two composers in writing religious works. Wagner being attracted by the sensuous side of the subject – the incense, ritual, beauty of sound & emotion, Stravinsky by the moral, the psychological side, yet tremendously influenced by the ritual side as well. Parsifal is musically tremendously unequal, but has some first rate ideas. Stravinsky has written an epoch-making work.[48]

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[45] Britten's setting of Blake's *A Poison Tree* – a poem that subverts the Biblical Eden – may be predictive of Britten's move away from organized religion (2 March 1935, set again in the 1965 *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*).

[46] Unpublished (Britten–Pears Library).

[47] Mitchell–Reed 1991:458.

[48] Unpublished (Britten–Pears Library).

Here we find indications of the distinctions Britten was to make in separating his music – in which he claimed he 'was certainly a Christian' – from his person, who 'could not accept church doctrine'. Knowing what we do about Britten now, it may at first seem obvious that he would incline towards his own definition of Stravinsky's Apollonian aesthetic approach. But Britten's positive view of Wagner's Dionysian sensuality is crucial too and, perhaps, a key to the pervasive 'humanism' of his musical manner in contrast with Stravinsky.

Britten's association of Wagner with ritual, incense, beauty of sound and emotion is notable given the ascetic, quasi-ceremonial discipline Britten applied to his musical techniques after *War Requiem* in the three Parables and final operas, *Wingrave* and *Death in Venice* (i.e. the 'Wagnerian element' repressed in the 'Stravinskian element'). Certainly the dialectic between Apollonian order and Dionysian passion informs the entire world of the final opera, a dialectic stemming from Britten's personality as identified by Auden in a letter to Britten in 1942:

> Goodness and Beauty are the results of a perfect balance between Order and Chaos, Bohemianism and Bourgeois Convention. Bohemian chaos alone ends in a mad jumble of beautiful scraps; Bourgeois convention alone ends in large unfeeling corpses.
>
> Every artist except the supreme masters has a bias one way or the other. The best pair of opposites I can think of in music are Wagner and Strauss. (Technical skill always comes from the bourgeois side of one's nature.)
>
> For middle-class Englishmen like you and me, the danger is of course the second. Your attraction to thin-as-a-board juveniles, i.e. to the sexless and innocent, is a symptom of this. And I am certain too that it is your denial and evasion of the ['attractions' (crossed-out)]

> demands of disorder that is responsible for your attacks of ill-health, i.e. sickness is your substitute for the Bohemian.[49]

Britten stated 'Auden is in all my operas', and Auden's identification of the dualisms 'Order–Chaos', 'Bourgeois Convention–Bohemianism' is germane to the present thesis.[50] They will be shown to play into a complex series of moral and aesthetic dualisms in Britten's work, particularly from *Fathers* on (his first Auden collaboration).

In spite of Britten's dabbling with communism and his altercations with his mother during 1935–36 regarding taking communion and attending church, one still observes an internal spiritual struggle with God Himself. This reaches a hiatus in the immediate wake of the death of his mother on 31 January 1937:

> Nothing one can do eases the terrible ache that one feels – O God Almighty.[51]
>
> Why, oh why, if God is a beneficent god, does he do it? It's more than the likes of me can understand. So young, so useful & so healthy too – and so incredibly wanted.[52]

Britten publicly reflected on this crisis in 1942:

> For me to produce my best music it is always essential for the purely musical ideal or germ to precede the external stimulus. In the case of the *Sinfonia da Requiem* [1940] this external stimulus was the death of my mother a few years ago. It had an especially powerful emotional effect on me and set me, in self-defence, analysing my feelings in regard to suffering and death. To this personal tragedy were soon

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[49] Mitchell–Reed 1991:1015–16. The letter was first published in Mitchell 1981:160–63, fn. 2, who makes the 'order–chaos' connection directly to the 'Apollonian–Dionysian' dialectic of *Venice*.

[50] Britten (cited Carpenter 1992:248).

[51] Mitchell–Reed 1991:474.

[52] Unpublished, 12 Feb. 1937 (Britten–Pears Library).

> added the more general world tragedies of the Spanish and present wars.[53]

Again, one notes the interaction of war, 'self-defence' and religion in the subtext of the orchestral *Sinfonia*, the clinching work of Britten's early manner and of great singular import to *War Requiem*.

It does appear that the combined direct influence of Auden from 1935 to 1942, the death of Britten's mother, and the death of Peter Pears' close friend, Peter Burra, on 27 April 1937 (an incident that brought Britten and Pears, his subsequent lover and creative partner, into a much closer relationship than hitherto) did much to disrupt Britten's formerly-held religious convictions. Lennox Berkeley wrote to Britten on 8 May:

> That funeral [of Peter Burra on 29th April] was one of the most heart-rending things I have ever known. A thing like that does make me cling desperately to such religious faith as I have. I'm sure you ought to reconsider all that – it does matter so terribly.[54]

Apparently a previous discussion had occurred concerning Britten's failing religious faith – not simply a decision to stop attending church.

The rupture with religion in 1937 seems to have precipitated a corresponding upheaval with his siblings, primarily with his older brother Robert. On 23 August there was a 'first-rate bust up' with Robert and other family members acting unofficially *in loco parentis*. It is clear that this was prompted by concern over the influence of Auden and his entourage and possibly the fear that this was leading the composer in a more determinedly

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[53] Britten (*L*) 1942:138.
[54] Mitchell–Reed 1991:490 (fn. 1).

homosexual direction.[55] (Of course it was possible that Robert's concerns reflected their mother's, especially at the time of her death.) It is not unreasonable to speculate that such a family 'bust-up' may have ramifications for *Wingrave*, especially as its gestation may have begun before 1942.[56] Addressing Pears in their first extant letter (24 October 1937), Britten seems to communicate a more considerable determination to break with the religious bearings of his youth:

> Next year must be the beginning of grand things. Singing & life in general. No more of this messing about with Morning Services (either actually or morally!!!) – but la vie-grande in every sense (or perhaps its masculine...).[57]

Although the relationship with Pears was not to become physically involved (according to Pears) until 1939, the distinction Britten makes in the letter between 'the beginning of grand things' and his rejection of the religious mode of his youth is striking. Britten's further distinction between 'actually' and 'morally' indicates a separation between his rejection of established religious modes of worship – the 'Morning Services' – and his deeper rejection of Christianity rooted in Biblical doctrines that will prove significant

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[55] Mitchell–Reed 1991:505–6, fn. 1. Britten's unpublished diary entries for 12 April and 26 July indicate Robert's attempts to understand his change. In the former Britten comments '[Robert is] a very difficult person with an entirely dupal [*sic*] nature', indicating his awareness of dualism in a sibling.

[56] Tippett (Blyth 1981:71).

[57] Mitchell–Reed 1991:518.

in his later works. Auden's (and Isherwood's) self-proclaimed mission to bring Britten into a homosexual lifestyle has a role here:[58]

> Essentially the reason why any person in any age who has been brought up a Christian loses his faith is that he wants to go his own way and enjoy the pleasures of the world and the flesh.[59]

The development of Britten's pacifism in relation to his movement away from institutional religion is notable, not least in the impetus it gave to his compositional subjects during the mid- to late 1930s and beyond. His view of early Christianity as pacifist indicates the importance of the precedent of the early Church in the foundation of his own pacifist convictions:

> I am going to read E[velyn]. Underhill – she was obviously a great woman, but surely C[harles]. Williams is wrong – the early church was pacifist, until Constantine (?) made it the official religion, and it became political???[60]

Whether or not the early Church was exclusively 'totally pacifist' in the manner Britten believed, such an alignment would psychologically have provided him with a buttress against the 'fake' Christianity of a politicised later Church that urges upon its members the participation in 'just' wars.

The combination of religion and pacifism in this manner was to emerge most forcefully in Britten's public defence of his position to a Tribunal in 1942 which importantly provided a refutation of the Divinity of Christ germane to his break with both institutional and Biblical Christianity:

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[58] 'Auden made it his task to '"bring [Britten] out"–encourage him to throw away all repression. [...] [Isherwood:] "No doubt both of us tried to bring him out. [...] We were extraordinarily interfering in this respect"' (Isherwood cited Carpenter 1981:187–88).
[59] Auden (cited Davenport-Hines 1995:38).
[60] Mitchell–Reed 1991:1240.

> I cannot destroy a man's life because in every man there is the Spirit of God. I was brought up in the Church of England. I have not attended for the last five years. I do not believe in the Divinity of Christ, but I think his teaching is sound and his example should be followed. [...] The Local Tribunal failed to appreciate the religious background of my conscience trying to tie me down too narrowly to a belief in the divinity of Christ. I don't seek as suggested to pick & choose from his teaching, but I regard the whole context of his teaching & example as the standard by which I must judge.[61]

Britten's separation of Christ's Divinity from his teaching and example, a central component of traditional belief and the core example of Christian morality, is significant. The component of Britten's life keeping him from Biblical belief was not his pacifism, which Scripture allows, but his sexuality. In this sense, respecting all others, Britten's pacifism and relationship towards 'militarism' in general serves as a 'cover' for his sexuality.[62] Britten's consistent re-engagement with a 'Christian' dialogue in his music in which states of non-repentance are rationalized, places him in a passive–aggressive position:

> You cannot be a pacifist without being a sadist. [...] Psychologically, pacifism does not come about unless there is violent repression of sadism. I well remember that when Britten was first confronted with this diagnosis he said something like, 'Oh, Hans Keller has very penetrating insight, and nothing he says is ever quite wrong.' [...]
>
> This sadistic pacifism is one of the most powerful sources of Britten's creativity, because it produces conflict-laden situations. And just as you have the basic violent conflict between pacifism and sadism, so you have reflections of this conflict in his concentration on innocence. When you go into the sufferings of his innocent people, you find that quite often this 'innocence' is guilt. Once again we get a two-dimensional situation: innocence on the surface level, guilt lower down. [...]

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[61] Mitchell–Reed 1991:1046 with fn. 1, and 1058. See App. 2.
[62] Brett 1983:190.

> Britten is more concerned with *guilty* innocence than with suffering innocence [...]– guilty innocence is really a reflection of one of the most elemental forces in Britten's own psychology, 'sadistic pacifism'. That kind of pacifism is just as guilty as other types of innocence he describes. [...] What the individual 'fights' when he fights aggression is his own aggression. [...]
>
> It was through this psychological situation that Britten became strongly attracted to the basic ideals of Christianity–though I don't think he feels any allegiance to an established, institutionalised religion. [...] Christianity is *one* of the constructive possibilities, but not the only one, which his basic psychology offers. It's very important and very deep-reaching – hence he has applied Christian interpretations more than once. [...]
>
> [Britten's repressions] produce the guilt which he illuminates. He concentrates on the way guilt is the result of repression and, by doing so, establishes a type of musical forgiveness which had not existed before and which readily leads him to join hands, verbally, with Christian forgiveness. [...] Musical forgiveness expresses itself in Britten's work in the recognition that guilt is not guilt. A feeling of guilt is inevitably produced by an internal conflict. [...]
>
> Creative activity is a continuing process of [the] exorcism [of a sense of guilt]. [...] I should say that [Britten] is both chronically successful and that he chronically fails. [...] By chronically successful I mean that each work yields a valid explanation, an explanation which we experience when we hear it as potentially there in our own minds. By chronically failing I mean that both he and we still have that sadism there after the work is over. We have gained enormous insight into it, but we have not explained it away. [63]

Thus, a number of dualisms can be derived as interpretive keys that will be amplified throughout the thesis:

Pacifism	-	Sadism
Innocence	-	Guilt
Forgiveness	-	Condemnation

In placing Christianity as a component within his aesthetic, Britten's guilt is activated creatively towards an idealized state of 'guilty innocence'. This is

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[63] Keller 1973:235-39. Mitchell approaches this in his observation of Stravinsky 'Both affection and aggression are involved in his [musical] "love affairs"' (1963/93:99).

manifested in a passive-aggressive stance against conventional Christian doctrinal modes in a posture of unrepentant self-justification in which 'Pride' will be seen to be a core issue. Britten's passive-aggressive total pacifism, as expressed musically, could therefore become a moral basis in his art for preaching to hypocritically judgmental 'Christians' (e.g. one notes the careful official designation 'parable for Church performance' rather than 'Church Parables' in the published scores).[64]

For Britten this attack on religious hypocrisy might counteract or even negate the demands of repentance he would have felt as a man ostracized through his own unrepentant sin from the Church of his childhood and youth. Such passive-aggressive challenging of religious hypocrisy is clearly significant to *Grimes, War Requiem* and *Wingrave*. In such a formulation, notions of unrepentant militarism and violence would take on illicit significations, counterpointing the composer's areas of non-repentance. Such implications have significance for *Lucretia, Budd,* and *Wingrave*.

However the fact that Britten's own passive-aggression simultaneously requires aggression is indicative of a defensive militancy beyond the Biblically Christian. This is the late disclosure of *Wingrave* (e.g. the pacifist Owen's resigned 'Ugh! We're tainted all!' as he takes up his passive-aggressive stance against his militaristic family, indicating an awareness of his own ultimately unregenerate state, I.6, Fig. [1]162). It is amplified in *Venice* after Aschenbach rejects Christianity and discovers, lethally, that his

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[64] Britten discovered 'parable art' through Auden (Elliot 1985 and Mitchell 1987:21).

Apollonian conviction conceals a repressed Dionysian erotic violence manifested within himself. He chooses not to repent but to surrender to a Classical notion of fate that rationalizes his guilt as 'guilty innocence'. Thus, living in the Judeo–Christian era and not the Classical, he symbolically dies. In this way *Venice* ultimately discloses the true paradigm behind the metaphysics of Britten's operas, a situation concentrated upon in the present thesis.

4. *Paul Bunyan* and the configuring of Britten's new spiritual aesthetic

a. Our Hunting Fathers and spiritual relocations

In *Fathers*, the work he referred to as 'my Op. 1 alright' (actually his official opus 8), Britten distilled the fruits of his previous compositional development into a water-shed work that, as he himself intimated, would chart the course of his future.[65] Britten's confessed attraction towards 'the element of the preacher' in Auden is an important one in locating the shared but often relocated religious element in their work, from *Fathers* in 1936 to the composer's final setting of Auden in the lines edited from 'Out on the lawn' (1933) in the *Spring Symphony* of 1949.[66] This is especially true of their American operetta *Paul Bunyan* (1941). Isherwood encapsulated the gist of Auden's religious dualism:

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[65] Britten (cited Mitchell 1981:19).

[66] For Auden's recognition of the religious element in his earlier work, see Carpenter 1981:210.

> [Auden's] religion condemned [homosexuality] and he agreed it was sinful, though he fully intended to go on sinning.[67]

Britten could learn from Auden to translate his own spiritual tensions and conflicts into musical communication, a connection strengthened by their closely shared cultural background:[68]

> I don't believe you can express social or political or economic theories in [so-called 'abstract'] music, but by coupling new music with well-known musical phrases, I think it's possible to get over certain ideas.[69]

This connection would seem especially noteworthy as Auden's influence was to cover a period of profound turmoil in these areas of Britten's life. For Auden and Britten words and music became the media through which the dramas of conscience and morals could unfold, a dangerous territory as Britten observed: 'Great artists have often been destroyed by their consciences.'[70]

In his programme note for the first performance of *Fathers*, Britten wrote:

> At [the line] "O pride so hostile to our charity" the strings introduce a phrase which receives considerable prominence in each subsequent movement.'[71]

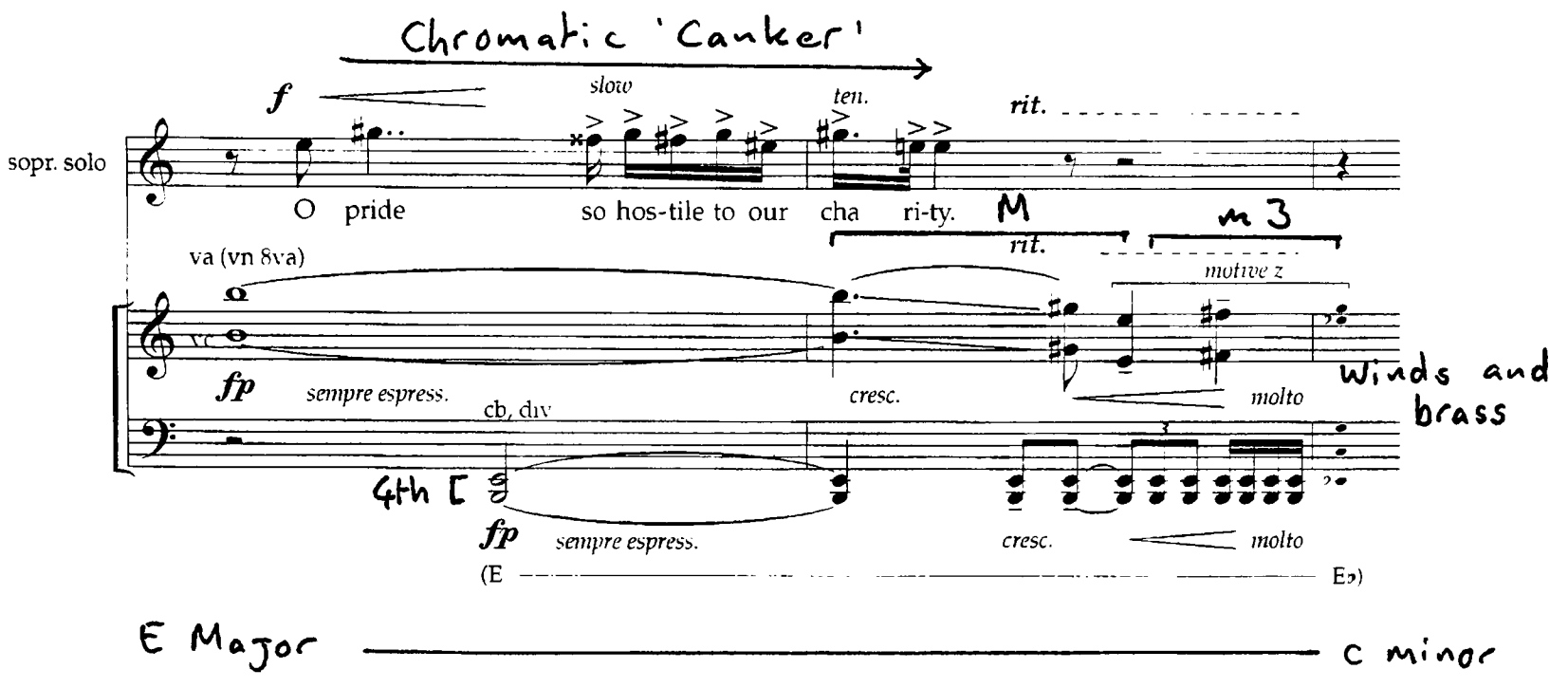
This motto is significant, not only to *Fathers*, but also in the way Britten's use of the major-minor third introduces the symbolism of a 'fall' from a higher state to a lesser state – a spiritual diminishment – so important in the

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[67] Isherwood (cited Carpenter 1981:299).
[68] Kildea (Cook 1999:36-53).
[69] Britten (*L*) 1942:138, also (*ON*) 1967:16, Nordoff–Robbins 1971:9.
[70] Britten 1952:15.
[71] Mitchell–Reed 1991:444, fn.1.

discourse of his later operas.[72] Indeed in *Venice* Aschenbach's proud E major is 'corrupted' by the minor third, especially telling in the music bridging the two acts, which is also underscored by a B–E dyad in the bass:[73]

Ex. 1, i, a. *Fathers*, Prologue, motto

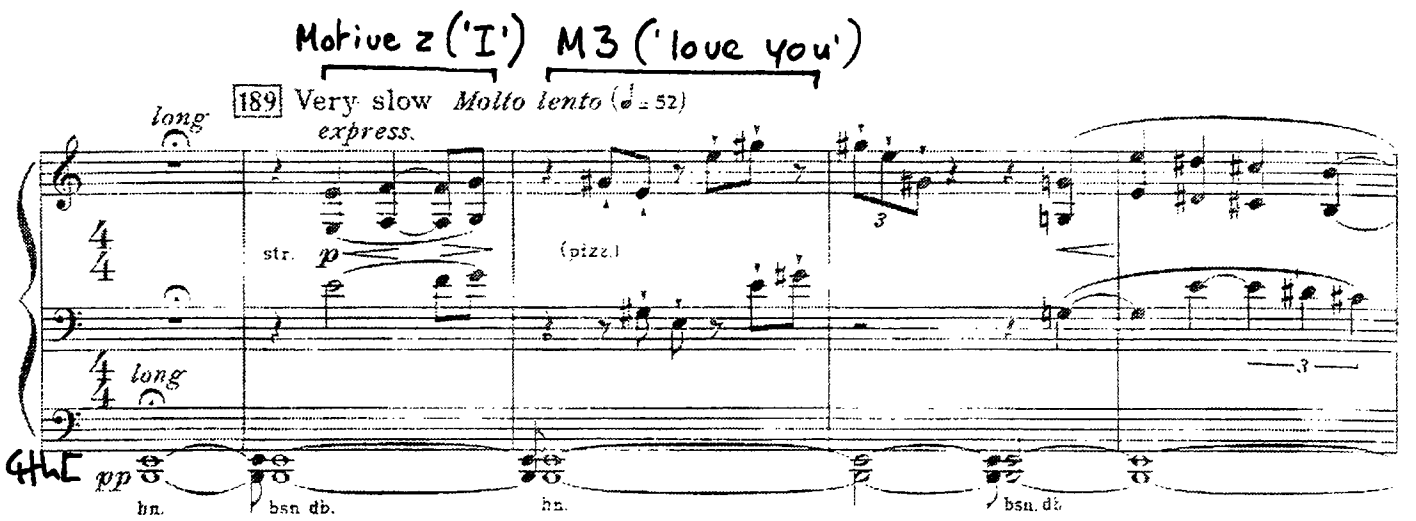


[72] The identification 'motto' is differentiated from 'Theme' as it recurs in each movement.
[73] The author is grateful to Professor Mervyn Cooke for making this connection.

Ex. 1, i, b. *Venice*, Aschenbach's 'diseased' discovery



ACT II



Two eminent Auden scholars have described the moral vision put forward in Auden's poem (originally titled 'The Creatures') as 'very close to Christian.'[74] The dualism of major–minor third in Britten's motto perfectly matches the hostility between 'charity' and 'pride', redemption and sin. The grammar of

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[74] Fuller 1998:251; Mendelson 1981:191.

Britten's expressive use of this traditional tension between major and minor third as an extension of the metaphysical tension between semitone = chromatic 'canker' / whole tone = spiritual wholeness (his inheritance from Schubert and Mahler) across the range of intervals (e.g. major–minor sixths and ninths in *Grimes* etc.) is a clear use of generally received notions of traditional musical language as a means of communication. Britten's extensive use of motives consisting of a tone and a semitone enclosed within a minor third, here designated as 'Motive z', informs many of his operas:

> The position of the semitones is one of the most important things in all music; for tunes are founded on scales, and the shape and character of a tune depends to a large extent on where its semitones occur.[75]

(It is notable in Ex. 1, I, b above how the Phrygian form of Motive z, so crucial for *Grimes*, is related to the subject 'I', while the 'positive' major third is projected onto the subject 'love you'.) Additionally, the semitonal relation within the motto (E–E^{b} in a harmonic move from E to c) is predictive of semitonal tensions – often related through the cycle of fifths – that will underpin many Britten dramaturgies and *dénouements*, often with religious overtones (e.g. B^{b}–B, *Budd*; $A^{\#}$/B^{b}–B , *Gloriana*; A–A^{b}, *Screw*; $F^{\#}$–F, *War Requiem*; $G^{\#}$–A, *Venice*).

Any tentative religious vision in the *Fathers* 'Prologue' is immediately undone by the setting of 'Rats Away', a poem cast in the form of a prayer of exorcism. This movement carries ramifications for the religious references of

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[75] Britten–Holst 1958:14.

the later operas in relation to the present thesis. Britten's comments on 'Rats' shed further light on the development of his pacifism and his questioning of religious authority:

> Words [for *Fathers*] are partly written & scheme devised by Wystan Auden – and it's pretty good – very satirical, and likely to cause a good amount of comment – especially the prayer to God to rid the house of rats. It has always puzzled me to think what the rats opinion must be of God (naturally the same God – vide the Bible & sparrows etc.) when being poisoned in the name of the Lord. Consequently you can imagine the setting isn't exactly reverent – words are lovely – Anglo Saxon modernised by W. H. A[uden].[76]

Britten's partial identification with the rats is indicative of a spiritual 'puzzlement' (to use Britten's word): given the acknowledged relationship of *Fathers* to the contemporaneous events of the Spanish Civil War and prophetic connection to the Second World War, the fact that homosexuals as well as Jews and Gypsies were the focus of Fascist hatred can be shown, for the first time, to play a role in the formation of Britten's pacifism in his music[77] (Britten read Palme Dutt's *Fascism* in 1935.[78]) The specific focus of Britten's criticism on the Bible is notable, and useful given the later distinctions to be made between his passive–aggressive relationship to Biblical Christianity as opposed to its 'political' institutional manifestation (e.g. the State Church in *Grimes* II.1 and the Munich Chapel scene in *Venice*, I.1).

Britten's mother reacted against 'Rats Away' (and *Fathers* in general), 'She disapproves very thoroughly of "Rats", but that is almost an incentive –

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[76] Mitchell–Reed 1991:429.
[77] Mitchell 1981:42-49 clarifies the connection of *Fathers* to the Spanish war and Fascism.
[78] Mitchell–Reed 1991:375.

no actual insult to her tho'.'[79] However Britten indicates here that he may have intended an actual insult towards what his mother represented and the Christian morals he would encourage Pears to dispense with in the following year. Originally a prayer of exorcism, it is clear that what is being cast out – the 'rats' – is symbolic of whatever is deemed illicit. Britten's reference to the rats having cognizant thought ('the rats opinion of God') suggests an animist view of rats as symbolic of man. (This is in keeping with Auden's animist symbolism, e.g. 'Fish in the unruffled lakes' set by Britten in 1938, cf. 'While the fish in the lakes their snapshots take' – sung by the camp animals in *Bunyan*, II.2, *25*, The Christmas Party, Fig. 10^{8}).[80]

The upward vocal scalic rush of the broken melisma on the word 'rats' is suggestive as much of excitement as of apprehension, supported by later use of rapid upward scales with a possible erotic ambiance in *Young Apollo* (1939), *Bunyan* (II.1, *23*, The Fight, Fig. 1) and *Grimes* (I.1, Fig. 41). Britten's additional insertion of outbursts of the phrase in the last part of the setting, especially where 'rats' infuse the invocation of the Trinity, is sharply ironic. Britten wrote that 'When "St. Kasi" is reached, quick quaver figures in the bassoons indicate a more subjective aspect of the pests.'[81]

There is a clear connection between Britten's use of the tuba sonority and minor third 'diminishment' derived from the motto in 'Rats' (the f minor at Fig. 10 coming after the 'bright' F from Fig. 8 on, predicting Claggart's

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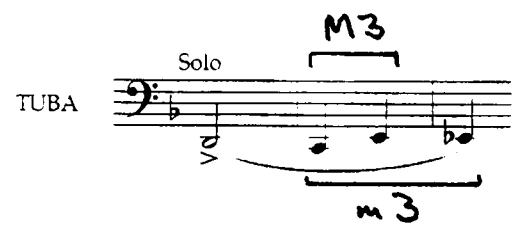
[79] Carpenter 1992:82, 86.
[80] Fuller 1998:316 notes the religious significance of The Christmas Party.
[81] Mitchell–Reed 1991:444, fn.1.

f minor 'corruption' of Vere in *Budd*), and its later use in *Venice*.[82] There it is used to symbolize Aschenbach's lethal outer-physical and inner-homoerotic plague:

Ex. 1, ii, a. *Fathers*, tuba motive derived from the motto ('Rats', Figs. 10-12)



Ex. 1, ii, b. *Venice*, tuba Plague Motive (II.8, Fig. 198)



Britten appears to consciously recognize and musically record for the first time the growing schism between the Christian paradigm of his childhood and youth with the new direction he was taking musically and personally – a steady incursion of 'rats' from the Christian perspective of the poem. These developments are confirmed by diary entries from this period.[83]

The last two 'Rats' features identified for present purposes are Britten's heterophonic treatment of the 'pride-charity' motto and his use of a reciting (Psalm) tone or monotone. The former is the earliest example of Britten's use of heterophony in a context where the tension between 'private' (possibly

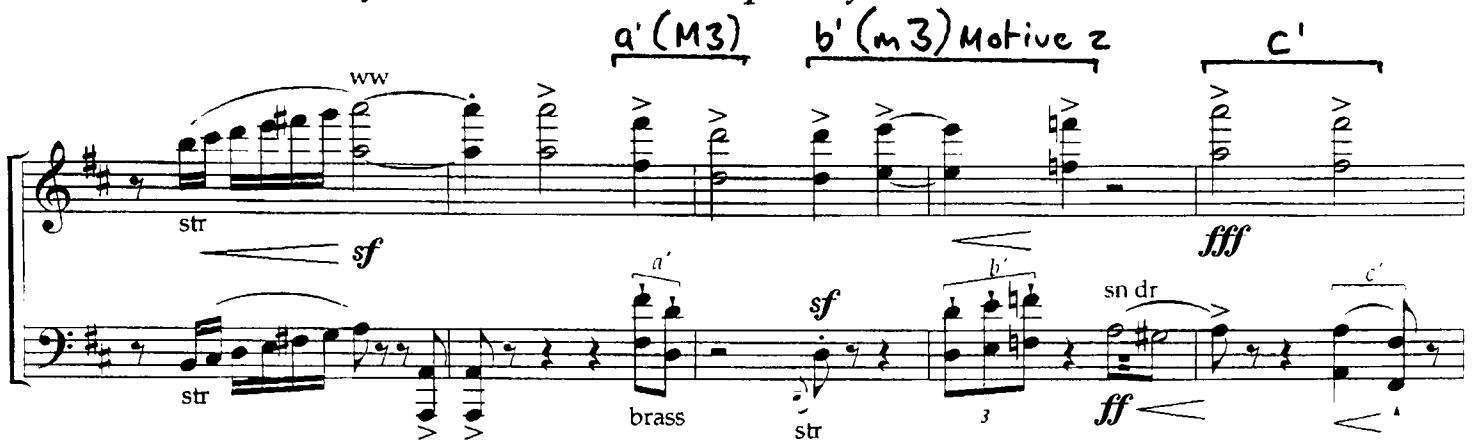
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[82] Mitchell 1981:37.

[83] Britten's reference on 1 Jan. 1936 to the biblical phrase 'Tell it not in Gath' (2 Samuel 1:20) may demonstrate an attempt to use the Biblical basis of David's and Jonathan's love for one another to rationalize his homoerotic love of Piers Dunkerley, later one of the dedicatees of *War Requiem* (Mitchell–Reed 1991:401, see also Carpenter 1992:75).

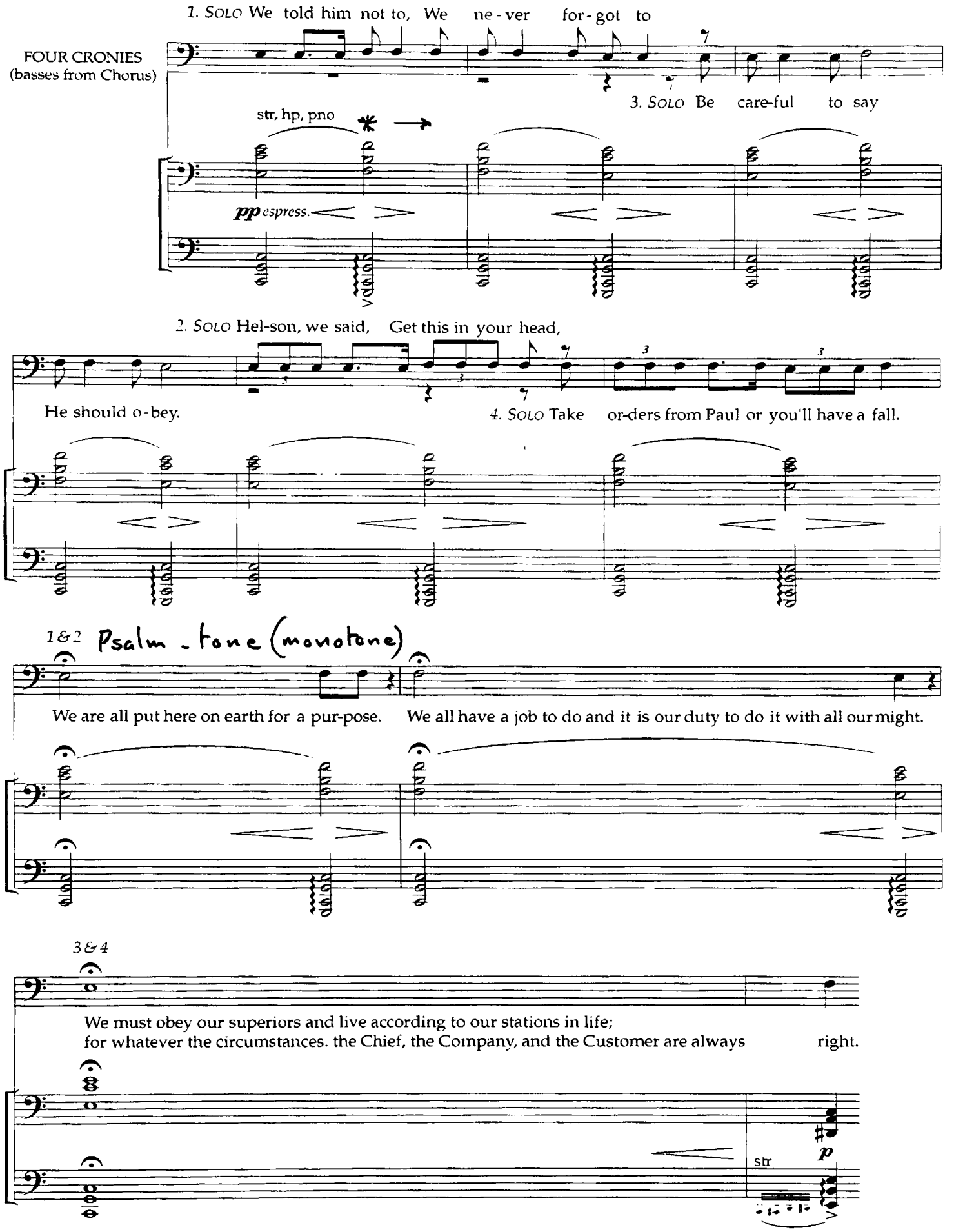
including homoeroticism) and 'public' (including religion) are combined in a synthetic manner:

Ex. 1, iii. 'Rats Away', orchestral heterophony



Britten's use of heterophony, often in orientally derived contexts, to symbolize an unattainable or remote state has gestural import for the operas. The parodistic use of the reciting tone recurs in the music of the Four Cronies in *Bunyan* (Ex. 1.iv) and Britten's use of the monotone as an important spiritual focal point also proves significant to the operas, perhaps most famously in Peter's 'Great Bear and Pleiades' aria (*Grimes*, I.2, Figs. 76–77):

Ex. 1, iv. *Bunyan*, Cronies monotones ('The Fight', II.1, 23, Mock Funeral March, Figs. 14–15).



* 'Storm Chord' configurations (cf. 'Grimes', tritone-plus-fourth(/fifth) cf. Ex. 5, v, b)

b. *Bunyan* and the making of operatic spiritual aesthetics

The materials of *Bunyan* divide into four essential categories:[84]

1. Numbers musically derived from religious/liturgical forms.

2. The three Ballad Interludes based on popular folk formulas.

3. Bunyan's accompanied monologues containing more complex musical and metaphysical materials and ideas.

4. Numbers musically derived from the popular American manner (e.g. Broadway).

For present purposes, it is primarily the interaction of the first category with the remaining three that is the focus. This subdivision is far from arbitrary. One of the first commentators noted that in *Bunyan* 'the world of the Saint and Broadway [...] rub shoulders'.[85] This juxtaposition of sacred and secular is an operatic dualism reflecting Britten's interest in the unresolved 'sacred and profane' to the end of his life. The numbers comprising category one are all choral:

1. Prologue: 'Once in a while' (2)

2. Hymn: 'Great Day of Discovery' (II.1, *12*, Fig. 17 *et seq.*)

3. Litany (II.2, *27*)

Although appearing small in quantity, the impact of these numbers is disproportionately increased by the fact that the Prologue and Litany create a characteristic framing 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue' to the drama, while the

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[84] The author is grateful to the New York Public Library and Columbia University for access to original documents (April-May 2001), and to the distinguished Auden scholar Professor Edward Mendelson (Columbia) whom he interviewed.
[85] Mitchell (Auden 1988:100).

Hymn is placed at the climactic moment of apparent resolution of the inner drama itself.[86] Therefore it will be prudent to consider each number in turn with the focus on raising issues of central significance to the later operas in relation to the present thesis.

1. Prologue

The C and E majors of the Prologue can be related to the 'innocence' of the *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* (1942) and the later interaction of E major and C major in the 'loss-of-innocence' of *Venice* and Third String Quartet (1975). The same 'guilty innocence' ambivalence may be read in Britten's use of C in *Lucretia.* The sacred–profane conjunction is also gently introduced in the *Bunyan* Prologue in the handling of the themes of Order and Chaos – a point of great significance to *Venice.*

Auden wrote of *Bunyan* as an American story with universal implications in its progression from wilderness chaos to civilized order, leading to the creation of freedom of choice.[87] Within the necessary stylistic limits of the American school operetta genre, Britten makes broad contrasts in the Prologue between his association of the major (often Lydian-inflected) mode with the Old Trees, who symbolize order–bourgeois convention, and the minor (often Phrygian-inflected) mode with the Three Geese and Young Trees, symbolizing youthful disorder. This is matched in Auden's opening

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[86] Note a similar demarcation in the structure of the Church Parables with plainsong and liturgical material.
[87] Auden 1988:3.

text by the contrast between the Apollonian 'controlling Sun' with Dionysian 'passionate' waters.

The view of Apollonian Order as a quality existing precariously on the brink of dissolution is ominously raised in the operetta's closing Litany (the operetta was composed during the height of World War Two). This kind of Apollonian–Dionysian dualism also has significance for the religious implications of *Grimes* (originally conceived in Pears' scenario as a metaphysical battle between 'sea' and 'land') and explications of *Lucretia* (the battle between male and female genders).

These connections are enhanced by the fact that the generative motive of the 'Revolution' embodied by the Three Geese and Young Trees is Motive z appearing as a minor third (tone plus semitone). Additionally the filled-in minor third is the obsessive motive that forms the heterophonic texture announcing the moon turning blue at the birth of Bunyan (Ex. I. v). Indeed the rising minor third E–$F^{\#}$–G of the blue moon heterophony is precisely the same pitch content as Motive *z* in the *Fathers* motto (compare with Ex. I.v with I.i).

There is a precedent here in the unifying Motive z of Britten's incidental music to *Johnson over Jordan* (1939), which has been labelled the 'death Motive'.[88] Britten's use of Motive z to symbolize either life or death, in both physical and metaphysical senses, will be seen and heard to be of great significance to *Grimes* and *Lucretia* (Ex. 1, v).

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[88] Reed (*JJ*) 1993:np.

It is proper in Britten scholarship to attribute the remarkable moment when Bunyan is born at the blue moon to the gamelan-inspired influence of Colin McPhee.[89] However there are also precedents in Britten's music itself, specifically in the 'Rats Away' example above.[90] In addition to heterophony, *Fathers* provides another precedent for the *Bunyan* Prologue in Britten's use of what will be termed his 'hymn-rhythm' style, a melodic style in regular rhythm often in conjunct motion (cf. 'Messalina', *Fathers*, Figs. 21–24).[91] The juxtaposition in the *Bunyan* Prologue of heterophony and the hymn-rhythm of the Anglican hymn-derived manner of 'Once in a while the odd thing happens' is a significant dramaturgical precedent for Britten's juxtaposition of heterophonic/orientally derived techniques with those of Christian materials in the operas.

The final issue in the Prologue for present purposes, involving both biographical and musical precedents, is the significance of Britten's subsequent blending of the minor third blue moon motive (Dionysian Geese and Young Trees) with the hymn-rhythm of 'Once in a while' (primarily Apollonian Old Trees). The biographical component has particular significance in that Britten's attempt to blend Western techniques with Eastern is an aesthetic attempt to blend the Christian with the non-Christian, a 'political' concern in many of Britten's operas from *Grimes* to *Venice*.

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[89] For a full account of the significance of McPhee on Britten's music, see Mitchell (Palmer 1984:192–210) and Cooke 1998:23–49.
[90] Cooke 1998:42.
[91] Evans 1979/96:106–7.

Ex. 1, v. *Bunyan*, Prologue (Figs. 11–12), heterophony (the birth of Bunyan)



This biographical ambiance emerges in Britten's later response to the blue moon music when he stated 'That was Peter'.[92] It has since been documented that between 9–19 June (i.e. before beginning *Bunyan*) Britten and Pears embarked upon what appears to have been for Britten his only fully committed physical relationship.[93] For Auden, 'A few months after meeting Kallman, he wrote his first libretto, *Paul Bunyan*.'[94] Chester Kallman became Auden's lifelong lover and creative partner. One scholar sees Auden's private vision in 'Once in a while' as a celebration of his newfound relationship to Kallman in rhythms of popular song.[95]

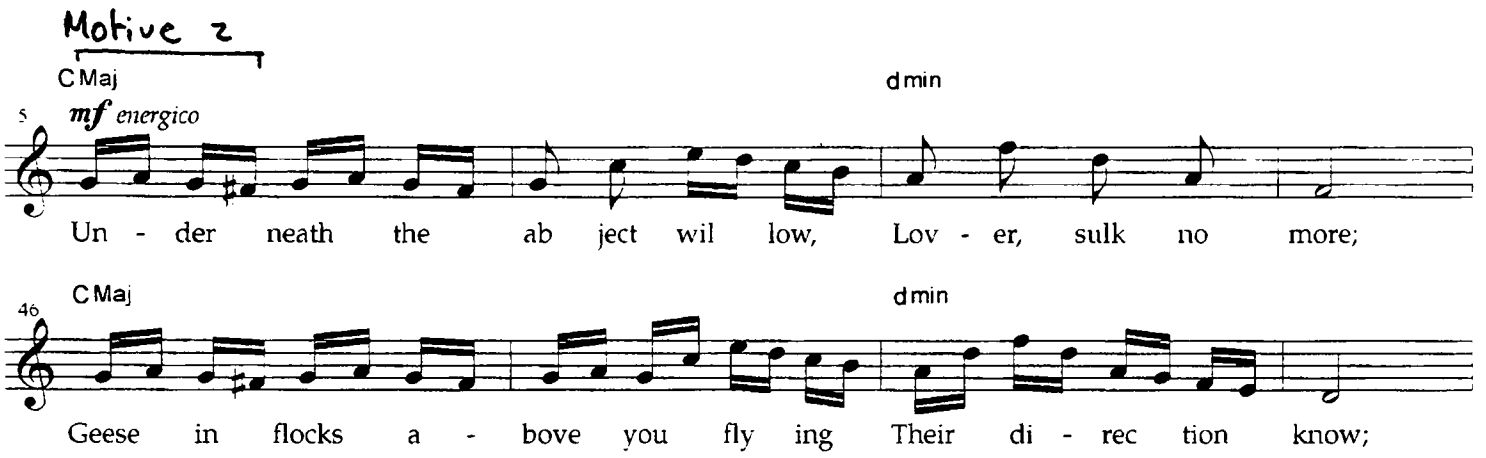
This compound of autobiographical significance is further enhanced by the fact that the announcement of the birth of Bunyan at the blue moon is made by the Three Geese. Auden's earliest incitement to Britten to yield to his homosexual inclinations was manifested in a poem from March 1936, 'Underneath the Abject Willow', specifically dedicated to Britten in which the 'animal = amorality' analogy is provided by Geese in the third verse.[96] Auden critics also connect this poem with the text for 'Johnny's Regret' (*16*) in *Bunyan*, the character Johnny Inkslinger being variously viewed as representing Auden and Britten and their particular sexuality.[97]

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[92] 'It was during the American years, I believe, that they finally decided that they were meant for each other', Mitchell (Auden 1988:148).
[93] Carpenter 1992:130-1.
[94] Mendelson 1999:36; Wilcox 1997:14–16.
[95] Mendelson 1999:59.
[96] For the direct biographical analogy of this verse in the manner furthered here, see Mitchell 1981:163–64 (fn. 7).
[97] Fuller 1998:314 and Carpenter 1992:149.

Britten was to set 'Underneath the Abject Willow' twice, once in November 1936 in the aftermath of *Fathers* for two voices and piano (as the second of his *Two Ballads*), and secondly in 1941, contemporaneously with *Bunyan*, for high voice and piano.[98] The vocal line of the 1941 setting (and the opening verse of the 1936 version) approximates the obsessive shape of the *Bunyan* blue moon heterophony and the Motive z minor third introduced by the Three Wild Geese:

Ex. I, vi. 'Underneath the Abject Willow' (1941, Auden)



The Geese make no further appearance in *Bunyan* after the Prologue. However the same singers traditionally take the later roles of the Camp Animals, Fido, Moppet and Poppet.

There are other musical precedents of Britten's use of heterophony in *Bunyan* in addition to that of *Fathers*.[99] These are 'Being Beauteous' from *Les Illuminations* (1939, dedicated to Pears, at Fig. 4[1] after the words 'raucous music') and the opening vocal phrase of *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* (1940, dedicated to Pears). These examples of Britten's setting of texts by

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[98] Reed 1998:5 views the 1936 and 1941 versions as respectively a distancing from Auden and a celebration of his contentment with Pears.

[99] Discussion here does not include Britten's early orchestral use of heterophony, e.g. *Sinfonietta* (1932, opening horn theme) and *Canadian Carnival* (1939, Figs. 18–22).

homosexual writers in music expressly dedicated to Pears at the time their relationship began further serves to underpin the gestural symbolism of heterophonic–oriental sources. Britten consistently uses such Balinese-derived materials to symbolize a dualistic religious and erotic ideal that is ultimately unattainable.[100] Such a merging of fields has great import to the operas, not least in Britten's musical quest to find a kind of musical 'benediction' upon unregenerate actions.

These biographical and musical dimensions have dramaturgical significance for *Bunyan*: the heterophonic orchestral moment, with the absolute focus on the minor third and its clear textural derivation from Asian musical sources, stands as a polar opposite to the homophonic hymn style of 'Once in a while', with its focus on the major third. This juxtaposition is conflated in the 'bluesy' combination of major triad in the voices and minor third in the orchestra that coalesce in the closing bars of the Prologue:

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[100] Cooke 1998:224. Also Brett (Solie 1992:98–146) and 1994:235–57.

Ex. I, vii. *Bunyan*, Prologue, concluding bars



2. Hymn (from II.1, 23, The Fight, Fig. 17 *et seq.*)

Britten's decision to set the reprise of the Love Duet (Figs. 6–11) in the Hymn against the background of music clearly indebted to the closing movement of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* (1930) is of great interest, and has drawn comment.[101] His unbounded admiration for *Symphony of Psalms* is well documented and his comment 'I thought the end was truly inspired' identifies the precise model of inspiration behind the *Bunyan* Hymn and earlier *Sinfonia da Requiem* finale:[102]

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[101] Mitchell (Auden 1988:104); Porter 1997:17.
[102] Mitchell–Reed 1991:231.

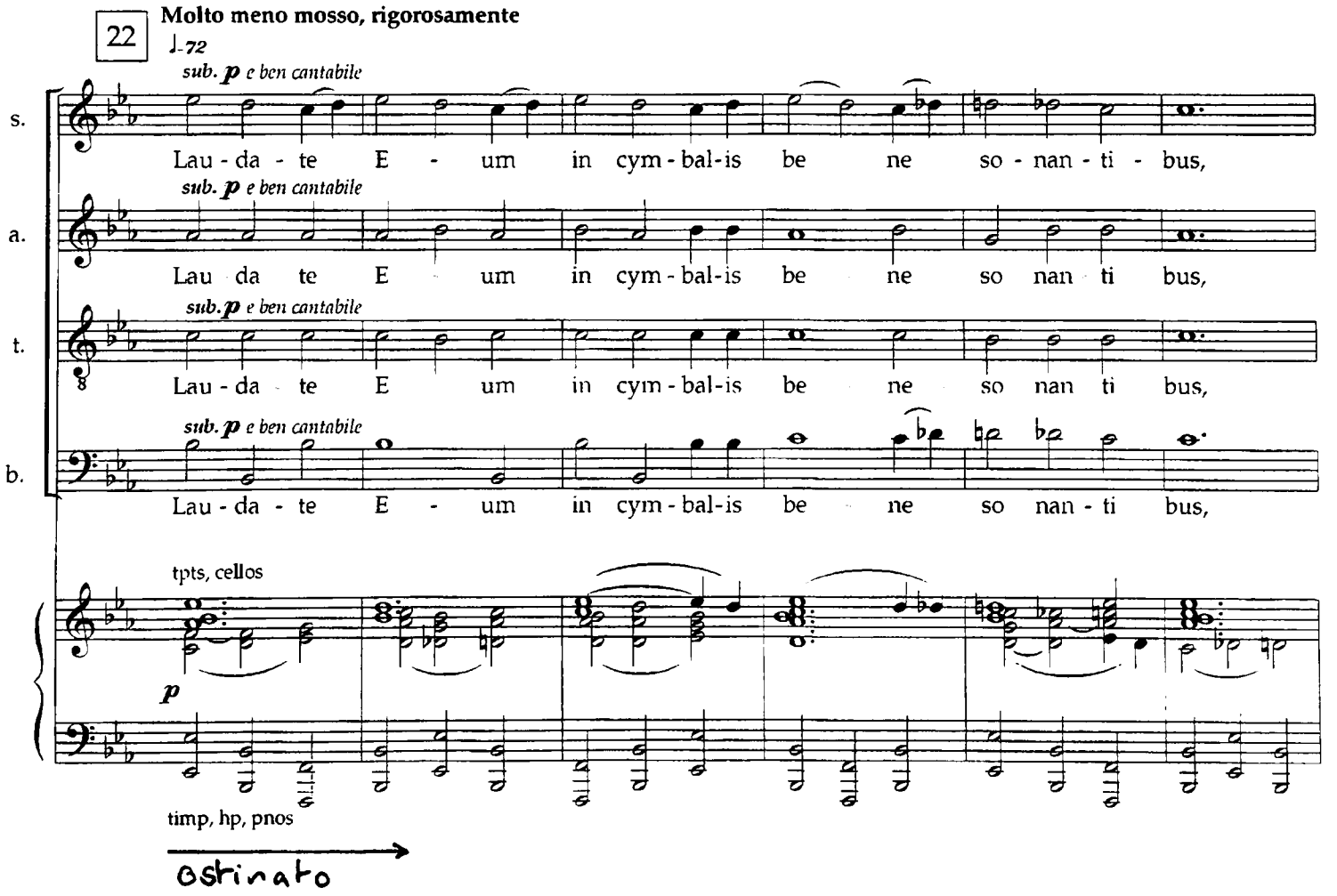
Ex. I, viii, a. *Bunyan*, Hymn, opening bars



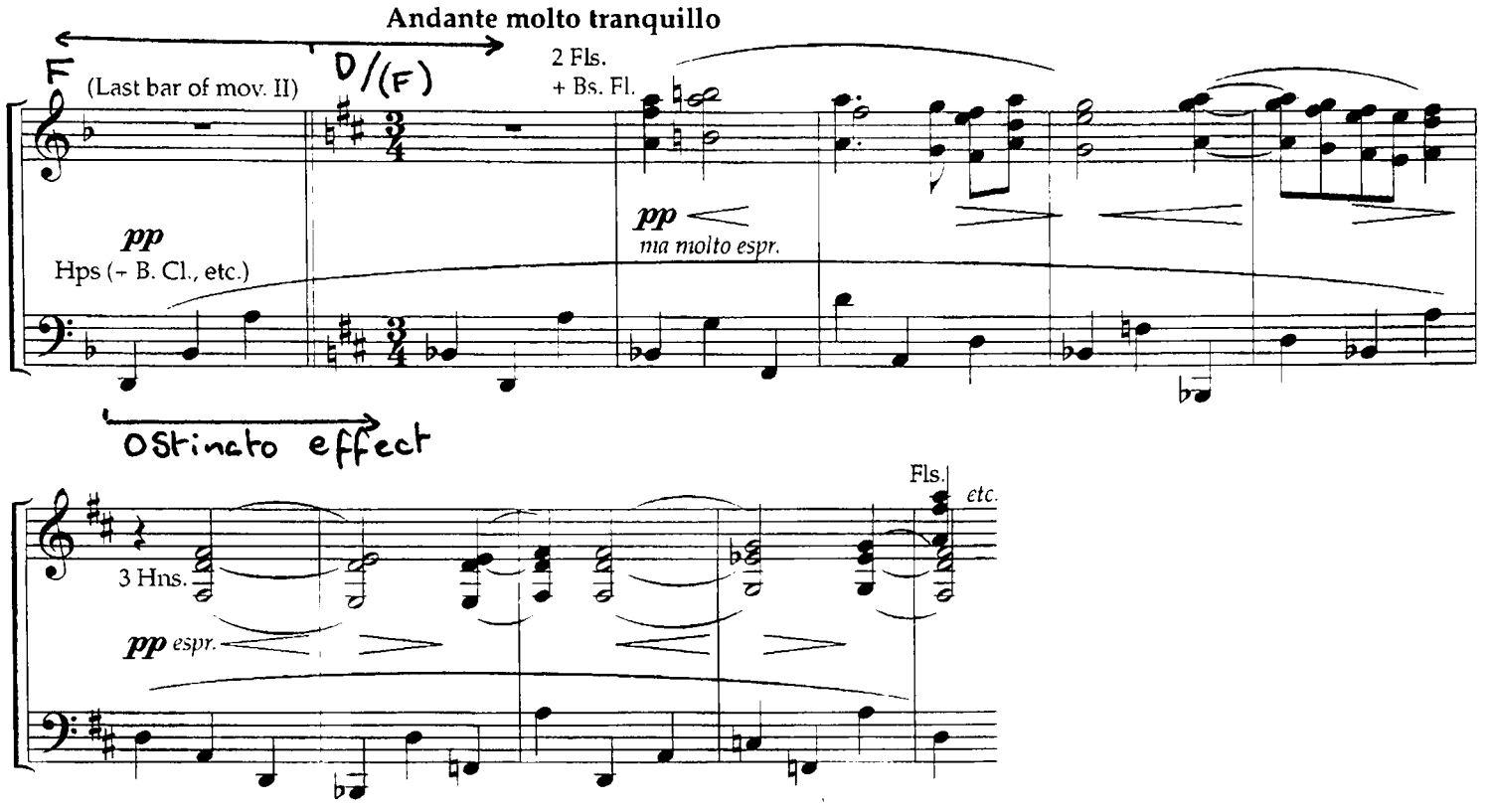
Continued over



Ex. I. viii, b. Stravinsky, *Symphony of Psalms* (1930, III, Fig. 22)



Ex. I. viii, c. *Sinfonia da Requiem*, (1940, III, 'Requiem aeternam')



There is a dualistic pull within Britten's musical aesthetic in the Hymn.[103] The false relations between the stentorian brass notes (moving note for note through a b minor arpeggio) against choral progressions of F to A^{b} and finally B major, with a sudden shift to the (Phrygian) C natural before Fig. 18) underpins the rhetoric of Bunyan's statements disclosing the private aspect of the preceding scene:

> BUNYAN
> Often thoughts of hate conceal
> Love we are ashamed to feel;
> In the climax of a fight
> Lost affection comes to light.

The flattening of the opening choral statements 'O great day of discovery!' and the diminished triad that completes the downward trajectory of 'And the prisoners are set free' creates an air of ambiguity.

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[103] Similarly 'Auden's technique is to set affirmative-sounding phrases in a complicated syntax that, when unravelled, proves to say something very different' (Mendelson 1981:232).

The subsequent diatonic flowering of the Love Duet melody in the new context of public celebration over the uncomplicated F major ostinato tread of the Stravinskian accompaniment indicates that the fight has been as purgative for Slim and Tiny as for Paul and Hel (the ostinato can be seen at Fig. 18 in Ex. I, viii, a). The tritonal relationship E^{b}–A of the juxtaposed *sfpp* chords accompanying '[And I, dear heart, am lost in] you! You!' at Fig. 20 as Hel restates 'Great day of discovery!' and the final chord of F major, emphasizing the fifth (F–C) undermines a complete sense of closure (Ex. 1, ix). This ambiguity points to the solemn ending of the operetta in the Litany.[104] (Additionally the A–E^{b} tritone anticipates the primary *Grimes* tritonal relationship of significance in much of Britten's subsequent music in contexts of self-defeat, e.g. *Phaedra*.)

The relative subjugation of Britten's compositional 'voice' in the Hymn possibly indicates a certain distancing technique. The generic borrowing acts as a screen on some level allowing Britten to avoid full commitment to whatever a given scene or moment may represent at face value, while borrowing from another successful generic context to secure a sufficiently complete impression. The fact that the same Stravinsky source is fully absorbed in the finale of the *Sinfonia* would be a case proving this point (Ex. 1.vii, c). The more or less overt 'Verdian' and 'Mahlerian' moments in *War*

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[104] A doubling of A in the sopranos could have theoretically given the final F a greater sense of closure.

Requiem might leave a similar impression.[105] This use of liturgically derived manners and borrowed genres also applies to Britten's subsequent operas.

Ex. 1, ix. *Bunyan*, Hymn, closing bars



[105] Boyd 1968:2-6.



3. Litany (II.2, 7)

It is perhaps Britten's greater genius for expressing the private over the public domain that causes the sheer expressive strength of the music for the Litany to cast a shadow across the operetta. This impression is accentuated through Britten's structural placing of the oratorio-like Prologue and Hymn discussed above, all serving at crucial junctures in the drama. It was clear to the initial audience that the operetta had a moral sting in its tail.[106]

The private moral is the expression of serious questions about the possibility of a future redemption conceived in the controlled norms of 'civilized' religion – a theme that would inform many Britten operas as well as *War Requiem*. *Fathers* is again a precedent here – especially as the Camp Animals sing the Litany. Beyond this it is possible to view the Litany as one

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[106] Hoffman 1952:152.

of Britten's earliest passive–aggressive sermons (or parables) to a society claiming to be Christian.

As with the Prologue and Hymn the Litany poses a social question as an aesthetic issue, which it must as the threshold of 'the world of choice' is contemplated. In the final analysis it is Apollonian Bourgeois convention that will tentatively triumph (the Prologue, Hymn and Litany all close with the major triads representing, at the outset of the operetta, the 'conventionalism' of the Old Trees rather than the minor and diminished musical character of the Geese and Young Trees).

Tentative victory is suggested by the actual Litany segments (i.e. the explicitly human choral unison melody as opposed to the animal chant episodes), which have Dorian mode colourings (on B^{b} at the beginning, C at Fig. 2 and D at Fig. 4). The minor inclination of this mode flowers into major cadences, C major, D major and D^{b} major respectively, culminating in the F major that closes the operetta. Thus the Litany, as an Epilogue, may be heard to represent the theme of 'young grown old' in its opening text (minor→major = Pride→Charity) and, as such, a completed circuit from the Prologue, where minor = Young Trees and major = Old Trees. Therefore there is a progression from 'natural disciplines' to 'the life of choice': the Bourgeois–Apollonian has necessarily and inevitably triumphed over the Bohemian–Dionysian – though the warnings of failure within that success are adumbrated in the chant. (The illusion of 'control' and 'order' without Christ, and the resultant Apollonian

repression and, thus, concealment of immanently destructive Dionysian forces became a Britten theme finally explicated in spiritual terms in *Venice*.)

The b^b–F progression of the Litany is striking given Britten's later use of B^b as a key symbolic of 'salvation', gained or lost (e.g. *Grimes*, II.2; *Budd*, Epilogue; the Father's home in *The Prodigal Son* and the *Wingrave* Peace Aria). The closing F major triads of the operetta are in effect a tenuous restatement of the concluding F major of the Hymn (with its Love Duet consummation).

The Litany gently replaces the raucous celebrations of The Christmas Party (A–D major) with a musical question mark in the same way that *War Requiem*'s concluding 'Requiescant in pace' gently undermines the sonorous confidence of the preceding 'In paradisum' – a connection greatly enhanced by the fact that The Christmas Party and 'In Paradisum' are in D major and Lydian D respectively, and the Litany and 'Requiescant' both close with F major triads. (The D major/Lydian–F major interaction is also important in the concluding 'Requiem aeternam' of the *Sinfonia*, the model for the close of *War Requiem*, and Ellen Orford's *Grimes* I.1 aria, 'Let her among you without fault, cast the first stone').

That the obviously 'high' sentiments of the main burden of the Litany are expressed by three women (originally the subversive Three Geese of the Prologue) dressed as the Camp Animals singing Anglican chant is inescapably suggestive of Auden-like subversion and one recalls Britten's

claim that '[Auden] was a great one for singing unlikely words to Anglican chants.'[107]

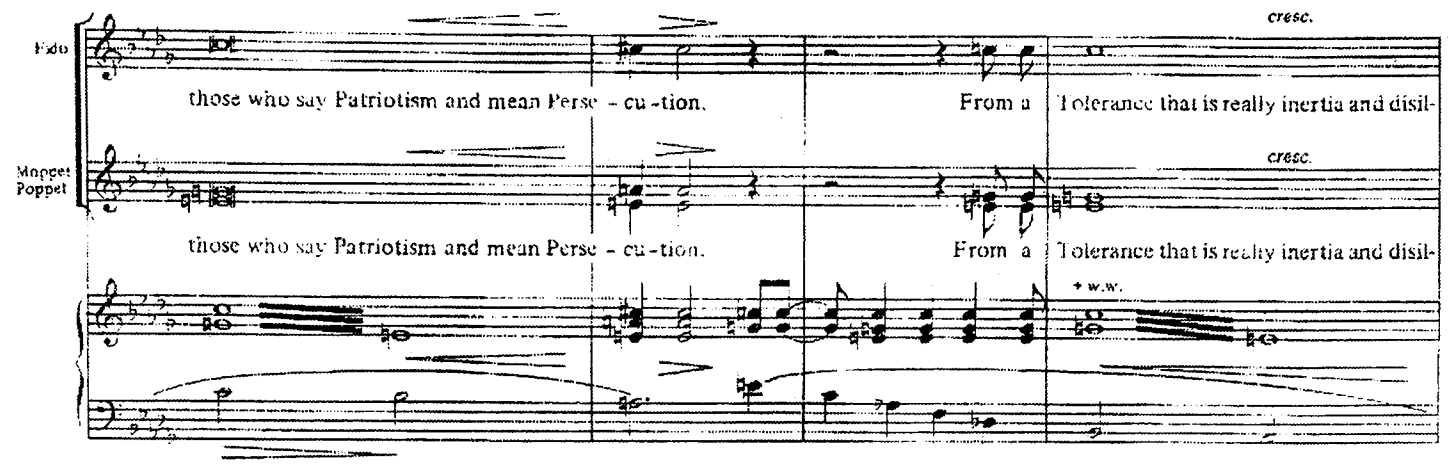
The bitonal crystallization between the major triads of the voices and the third-based figure (derived from the litany melody) in the bass clarinet and bassoon, beginning with a diminished triad, creates the effect of expressive appoggiatura (notably the diminished sixth) that presages the same effect in Interlude I and many of the later Ellen contexts in *Grimes* (see Ex. I. x below and compare with Exs. 2, vii, a–b). The specifically Anglican resonance of these moments in *Bunyan* can of course be neatly harmonized with Auden's decision in 1941 to return to some kind of relationship (an official 'conversion') with the Episcopalian Church in America. Britten's decision to return to England in 1942, where he essentially remained outside the religion of his childhood, nonetheless returned the Anglican resonances in *Bunyan* to their native culture. That Britten's engagement with established religion found 'home ground' in a multitude of works dealing with Christian themes, not least the his operatic dramaturgies, was more than coincidental. It was, indeed, prophetic.

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[107] Britten (*ST*) 1963:5. The earlier 'animal' numbers (e.g. Animal Trio, I.1, *8* and Cats' Creed, II.1, *22*) suggests parallels between the Camp Animals and the Nieces/Borough prostitutes of *Grimes*.

Ex. I, x. *Bunyan*, Litany, choral litany and animal chant




Fido
Moppet
Poppet
those who say Patriotism and mean Perse - cu - tion.
From a
Tolerance that is really inertia and disil-
cresc.
+ w.w.


1
Fido
Moppet
Poppet
- lu - sion:
- lu - sion:
TINY, SLIM (speaking)
Bless us, father.
S.A.
CHORUS
T.B.
Save
a - ni - mals and
men.
w.w., pft., str.
cl., hp.
b.cl.
str.


PAUL BUNYAN
A father cannot bless.
May you find the happiness that you possess.
2
S.A.
CHORUS
T.B.
(unis.)
The
ech - o-ing axe shall be
ob.
bsn.
tutti
espress.

Chapter 2: PETER GRIMES: redemption rejected

'Ellen is growing in importance.'[1]

After his return to England in 1942, Britten's tribunal statements defending his pacifist stance (Chapter One) reveal a complex relationship to religion and religious themes echoed in his first grand opera *Peter Grimes* (1945), the song cycle *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (1945) and first chamber opera, *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946). *Grimes* scholarship roughly divides between critics who view the opera in nihilistic terms (e.g. 'Christianity [...] is uninfluential for good. [...] The death of Peter [...] does not "make sacred"'), and those who discern the opera as 'a moral parable [with] Christian implications and a strong Christian undertone.'[2] Although these positions appear contradictory, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive (although clearly they are in tension, and early reception history of *Grimes* detected 'the sense of tension, nervous & spiritual tension, which runs through it').[3]

The present chapter proposes a reading of *Grimes* by investigating its Christian implications and undertone.[4] Such implications bypass the institutions of Borough religion, an approach that can be viewed as reflecting Britten's own distance from established religion at the time. Instead it will be

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[1] Britten (Mitchell–Reed 1991:1037).
[2] Garvie (Brett 1983:172–79); Elliott 1986:29.
[3] Unpublished. Graham Sutherland cited by Walter Hussey in a letter to Britten, 13 July 1945 (Britten–Pears Library). This was discussed in the context of Sutherland's *Crucifixion*.
[4] Allen (Cooke 1999:81–94) provides a more general application of the present chapter.

proposed that an important and subtle type of redemptive element in the opera, ultimately rejected by Peter, is located in the female protagonist Ellen Orford.

1. The remaking of Crabbe's religious institutions in the opera

Pears recounted that, after Britten's experience with Auden on *Bunyan*, he discussed 'almost every word' of *Grimes* with his librettist Montagu Slater, 'and a similar pattern was followed in collaboration with other writers.'[5] There is little doubt, therefore, that Britten's libretti after *Bunyan* reflected what he wanted them to say with a high degree of precision.

Sectarian religion is questioned in *Grimes* via the fundamentalism symbolized by the Methodist lay-preacher Robert Boles. George Crabbe, author of the poem 'The Borough' on which the opera is based, would have apparently rejoiced at such a questioning.[6] However the very Anglo-Catholic institution Crabbe served as a clergyman is also confronted, an important distinction from 'The Borough' in the creation of the spiritual aesthetics of the opera. Britten's implied criticism of established religious institutions in England and their failure to advance a 'true Christianity' stems from his passive–aggressive pacifism discussed above.

Although dealing straightforwardly with issues of nihilism in the case of Peter himself, Britten's resistance to Biblical Christianity in *Grimes* is

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[5] Pears (Blyth 1981:22).
[6] Crabbe 1908:113–16; 121–27.

complex. This is distinct from his direct exposure of the hypocrisy of State organized and denominational religion. Britten's Puritanical nature may have 'shared [the Methodist] Boles' hell-fire conviction that all are sinners' while the composer's break with Biblical paradigms (as previously outlined) would require a simultaneous denunciation of such 'fundamentalism'.[7] Britten exposes Boles' lack of repentance in the pub scene (I.i), and through the operatic projection of his un-Christ-like animosity towards mankind in general. In Britten's Boles one can detect an amalgam of his religious convictions as a child and his simultaneous opposition to those convictions as an adult. A similar antagonistic paradox will be discovered on a much larger scale in *Billy Budd*.

Grimes may be viewed as a critique in symbolic terms of the failure of sinful man to embrace redemption as a deep personal conviction, preferring empty unthinking religious observance as a binding, essentially secular, social force. Britten's opera reveals the manner in which institutions and individuals that lay claim to being the church of Christ actually betray, Judas-like, the Spirit of Christ Himself. In this spirit a further question is posed, a question implicit in the ironies of the *Bunyan* Litany that Britten would return to many times in his art: 'When is a Christian not a Christian?' (This question may have been more pointed in 1945, two months after the cessation of the atrocities and immoralities of the war.) In *Grimes* this question is revealed as

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[7] Carpenter 1992:205.

both an outward probing, *vis-à-vis* the religious institutions in the opera, and an internal one, *vis-à-vis* Peter's ultimate rejection of Ellen Orford.

In this way Britten critiques the bigotry and double standards of 'civilized' society while simultaneously critiquing the self as an unrepentant sinner.[8] The inward concern of *Grimes* is encountered more explicitly in the *Donne* cycle, foregrounding the subject of repentance and, arguably, the failure (or refusal) to repent.[9] Given Britten's stated mission to be of use to society, a society including himself, such a question would certainly fit into the moral context of many of his operas.[10]

2. The Making of Ellen Orford

Slater wrote in 1945 that he had 'taken [Crabbe's] character sketches as clues and woven them into the story against the background of the Borough.'[11] Britten's making of Ellen is so germane to the present thesis, it will prove expedient to consider aspects of her development from poem to opera. In particular her representation of a genuine Christianity in Crabbe, which is greatly amplified in the opera, and her symbolizing Grimes' rejection of the Bible, found at the beginning of Crabbe's poem, will be examined.

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[8] See Ricoeur 1974:425–39 in the context of the 'critiquing of the self'. The author is grateful to Dr. Philip Rupprecht for bringing this article to his attention.
[9] Low (Roberts 1994:201–21).
[10] Britten 1964/78.
[11] Slater (Crozier 1945:26).

In Britten's copy of Crabbe there are several annotations made to the 'Ellen Orford' section of *The Borough*:[12]

> I've often marvell'd, when, by night, by day,
> I've mark'd the manners moving in my way,
> And heard the language and beheld the lives
> Of lass and love, goddesses and wives,
> That books, which promise much of life to give,
> Should show so little how we truly live.[13]
>
> Can he who loves me, whom I love, deceive?
> Can I such wrong of one so kind believe,
> Who lives but in my smile, who trembles when I grieve?[14]
>
> But Heav'n had mercy, and my need at length
> Urged me to labour, and renew'd my strength.[15]
>
> Still I submitted, – Oh! 'tis meet and fit
> In all we do to make the heart submit.[16]
>
> And, as my mind looks cheerful to my end,
> I love mankind, and call my God my friend.[17]

There is a unannotated footnote at the beginning of the poem which, given Slater's admission, cannot be overlooked:

> The Life of Ellen Orford, though sufficiently burdened with error and misfortune, has in it little besides which resembles those of the unhappy men in the preceding letters, and is still more unlike that of Grimes in a subsequent one. There is in this character cheerfulness and resignation, a more uniform piety, and an immovable trust in the aid of religion.[18]

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[12] Crabbe 1851:239–44.
[13] Lines 11–15:239.
[14] Lines 152–54:241.
[15] Lines 198–99:242.
[16] Lines 218–19:243. Three vertical lines in the margin mark out these particular lines. This is a rare emphasis.
[17] Lines 336–37:244.
[18] Crabbe 1851:239.

In the preface to the poem Crabbe wrote:

> Yet of the heroine she'd a share,
> She saved a lover from despair.[19]

Such an observation points toward her redemptive potential regarding Peter in the opera.

> The anonymous introduction to the first published libretto (1945) states:
>
> Among the poor folk of the town is the loveable Ellen Orford, a widow and the Borough schoolmistress, who sums up her own character [in Crabbe's' poem]–
>
> > I look'd around,
> > And in my school a bless'd subsistence found–
> > My winter-calm of life; to be of use
> > Would pleasant thoughts and heavenly hopes produce.[20]

This citation of another passage from Crabbe's poem in connection with the operatic Ellen, in which her religious nature is addressed, again demonstrates the importance of the poem for the development of the character. This same libretto edition later uses the character sketch:

> Ellen Orford has come in. She is a widow of about 40. Her children have died, or grown up and gone away, and in her loneliness she has become the Borough schoolmistress. A hard life has not hardened her. It has made her more charitable.[21]

Britten's estimation of Ellen is positive:[22]

> Frances James (Ellen Orford) was perhaps the best-known singer in the cast: she is obviously intelligent and gifted, and she made the most sympathetic character.[23]

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[19] Crabbe 1908:187.
[20] Anon., 1945:iv.
[21] Herbert 1979.89:97. The description in the libretto corresponds to the production note in the score (I.1, Fig. ^{8}25) 'Ellen Orford has come in, and stands listening.'
[22] Unlike Slater who described Ellen as 'unforgivable' (Crozier 1945:23).
[23] Blyth 1981:14. Also Pears (Palmer 1984:105).

The implicit contrast of Peter's 'Pride' with Ellen's 'Charity' recalls the *Our Hunting Fathers* motto ('O pride so hostile to our charity', Ex. 1, I, a). The conjunction of E major and c minor (relative of E^{b}) of the motto anticipates the semitonal conflicts between the worlds of Ellen and Peter (and the Borough). Motive z, the 'diminishment' of the (filled-in) minor third in relation to the major, identified in the *Fathers* motto and *Bunyan* Prologue, will prove crucial to the motivic working of *Grimes* and *Lucretia*, but now in more developed, motivic forms.

In the earliest drafts of the opera in 1942, Pears proposed in diagram form the opposing forces in the drama:[24]

Table 3: Pears' *Grimes* scenario (1942)

The Sea (The Incalculable— Uncontrolled) cf. war, violence	v.	The Earth (Secure—Unchanging) Peace etc.
Peter Grimes Smugglers	v.	Ellen Orford The boy Landlord Churchgoers

Although the 'Smugglers' were subsequently dropped and the Borough's antagonistic role enhanced by Slater along socialist lines, the sense of Pears' polarized format is retained in the finished opera to a surprising degree.[25]

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[24] Cited Brett 1983:48.

[25] Pears' reasserted influence perhaps (cf. the 1946 *Lucretia* revisions).

The connection between Ellen and the 'Churchgoers' in II.1, discussed in detail below, is particularly fascinating in this regard.

Pears' diagram was the first stage in three essential phases of the libretto's development:

1. Pears' version, in which Grimes and Ellen are opposed.

2. Slater's version, in which the opera becomes 'more and more an opera about the community'.[26]

3. Final version, 'In which Peter Grimes lost the psychological or even pathological groundings which Britten and Pears had initially imagined and which Slater had written into him.'[27]

Although the initial Grimes–Ellen opposition appears to be superseded, fundamental changes by Britten (and Pears) in the third stage restored it.[28] This restoration involved a critical shift in emphasis from the relationship between Peter and the boy apprentice (John) to that of Peter and Ellen. These changes, occupying 8 months, led Britten to announce to Elizabeth Mayer on 8 December 1943 that the libretto 'is excellent [...] now', and that he was about to start composing.[29]

This redirected focus on Grimes–Ellen is crucial. If, in 1942, Britten noted that Ellen was 'growing in importance', then her far greater development in the 1943 revisions would effectively restore Pears' 1942 dynamic, the Borough now more central. Slater's pivotal input and later

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[26] Britten (Mitchell–Reed 1991:1037).
[27] Brett 1983:69.
[28] This final stage is also not without revision. White 1970/83:127 lists the five published libretto versions.
[29] Brett 1983:67 and in Banks 1996/2000:27–29, 31, for the quoted letters.

marginalisation, culminating in his independent publication of his libretto version in 1946, reflect such developments.[30]

The shift from (Slater's) social emphasis to a spiritual dynamic was outlined as an operatic concern by Britten:

> Eric Crozier
> And you're not really interested in human conflict simply in finite terms – social terms, as it were; you're interested in ['other planes of significance in'] human conflict because you respond very deeply to people's feelings.
>
> Britten
> Yes. I think, if one looks back over the operas that I have written up to date, one does find a kind of pattern running through them, but I must admit that I haven't been very conscious of that pattern. But I do think you are quite right, there are certain conflicts which do worry me a great deal, and I want to say things about them in musical terms.[31]

The universal appeal of *Grimes* in the international repertory is a matter of historical record. Spiritual conflict is a large component of this success. Britten's use of a specifically Christian element as contributive to such conflict is a core component of the *Grimes* dynamic, as made explicit in *Lucretia* and *Budd*. In the context of 'a quality of extension from the story – that you start with real characters, human characters, which are then extended to other planes of significance', Britten was asked:

> E. M. Forster
> You think this is the kind of thing that would appeal to a person who saw the universe through music? [...]
>
> Britten
> Yes.[32]

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[30] Slater 1946:7–56.
[31] Britten (*BBC*) 1960, a discussion between Britten, Forster and Crozier. Britten's recognition of the importance of his unconscious is notable.
[32] *Ibid.*

Peter's spiritual story gives life to an opera in a manner reflecting Britten's (i.e. *Grimes* partly draws its aesthetic strength as spiritual autobiography through its music):

> A central feeling for us was that of the individual against the crowd, with ironic overtones for our own situation. As conscientious objectors we were out of it. We couldn't say we suffered physically, but naturally we experienced tremendous tension. I think it was partly this feeling which led us to make Grimes a character of vision and conflict, the tortured idealist he is, rather than the villain he was in Crabbe.[33]

Britten's identification that they did not 'suffer physically' surely throws the full weight of the experience of 'tremendous tension' into the spiritual domain. This equally applies to Britten's experience of separation from both Biblical and institutional Christianity, indicating a link between spiritual tensions and total pacifism, a point with direct relevance to *War Requiem* and *Wingrave*.[34]

Britten referred to Peter's and Ellen's duet at the end of the Prologue as a 'love duet'.[35] This confirms Pears' opinion that the issue of homosexuality in *Grimes* 'is unimportant & doesn't really exist in the music (or at any rate obtrude) so it mustn't do in the words', indicating earlier conversations where homosexuality existing in music independently of words was apparently important to the composer.[36] Britten's stated view of music as 'communication' and a means of 'educating' (Chapter One) raise questions about how his experience of spiritual tension via sexuality and pacifism were

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[33] Britten (Shafer 1963:116–17).
[34] Brett 1983:190–6 and McClatchie 1996.
[35] Mitchell–Reed 1991:1181.
[36] *Ibid.*:1189.

technically configured in his music through a network of musical symbols and sonic analogies.

Pride and self-destruction indubitably concern the finished form of *Grimes* with the rejection of Love and Redemption.[37] A particular sexual tension may be adjunct to this central issue as Pears admitted: Grimes may or may not be aware of his internal sexual struggle, (a point applicable to other Britten operatic protagonists). However Grimes' strong standing in the international repertory cannot be rationalized only by sexual reductionism. The central issues of *Grimes* became those of a genuine tension in Peter's relationship with Ellen and his inflicting of psychological and physical cruelty upon children, both with 'extended' metaphysical consequences. The outcome of both is a projection of Peter's self-hatred and his choice of a non-redemptive self-sacrifice on the altar of his unrepentant pride. This is mirrored by the society in which he exists and through which his self-hatred is externalised (i.e. the balancing of Pears' and Slater's respective scenarios).[38] Britten made such delicate balances clear, specifically in relation to *Grimes*:

> If the work has overtones or undercurrents, let them appear by themselves and do not emphasize them; that is sure to put the work out of joint.[39]

Slater noted that Crabbe's unconscious creation of Peter as a romantic Byron was portrayed in the opening of the 'Peter Grimes' section of

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[37] Brett 1983:180–89.
[38] Brett (Banks 1996/2000:53–78).
[39] Blyth 1981:15.

The Borough, where Peter rejects both his father and the Bible.[40] This would have resonated for Britten in relation to his rejection of the religion of his mother and his youth, as indicated elsewhere.[41] The polarization of 'Bible v. Romantic self-willed pride' as a clue to Britten's re-alignment of Crabbe has not been previously investigated. Yet in the earliest scenarios of the opera (1942) a deathbed scene was envisioned in which Grimes' father, accompanied and nursed by Ellen, is rejected by Peter who enters drunk: 'Pears remembers that the father solemnly cursed the young man Grimes.'[42] That the operatic Ellen was aligned with the Biblical component represented by Grimes' father in Crabbe is a further spiritual importation of central significance to the dramaturgy, especially in relation to Peter.

This kind of Christian transference registers in Britten's and Slater's overt use of the Biblical account of Christ and the adulterous woman (John 8:1–10) as the basis for Ellen's I.1 aria at Fig 28 ('Let her among you without fault cast the first stone'). Ellen's words clearly manifest a self-alignment with Christ. If the implicit Biblical dynamics are pursued, the Borough corresponds to the 'Pharisees and Sadducees' she identifies, and Peter would correspond with the woman apparently caught in the act of adultery. This kind of identification of the operatic feminine as 'saviour' of the male protagonist has

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[40] Slater (Crozier 1945:15).
[41] White 1970/83:122–23.
[42] L5, Plate 7a, and page 60, Banks 1996/2000.

a long tradition reaching back at least to Beethoven's *Fidelio*, an opera that Britten had referred to as 'deep religious & exhilarating experience.'[43]

The polarity between Peter and Ellen, which may be universalised as an extension of the Male–Female types, is made by Britten in his use of a variety of musical techniques. It will be shown that such usage is consistent with that used in *Lucretia* and successive operas. In *Grimes* these techniques identify Peter and Ellen as belonging to different elemental properties: Grimes = the sea and night, Ellen = the sun and light.[44] This polarization may be viewed as a reconfiguring of the Dionysian–Chaos versus Apollonian–Order dialectic that Auden had identified in Britten's artistic personality in 1942, discussed above in relation to the *Bunyan* Prologue:

Table 4: Examples of the relationship between Ellen Orford and the concepts of 'light', 'day' and 'sun'

1. ELLEN
   'Unclouded the hot sun will spread his rays around.'
   Love Duet, Prologue

2. PETER
   'With her there'll be no quarrels, With her the mood will stay,
   A harbour evermore, Where night is turned to day'. I.1, Fig. 50[8]
   Within the aesthetic field of the opera Peter consistently refers to Ellen as the 'day' in which the 'night' of his soul can find rest.[45]

3. ELLEN
   Glitter of waves
   And glitter of sunlight
   Bid us rejoice
   And lift our hearts on high.

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[43] Unpublished, 13 Jan. 1937 (Britten–Pears Library).
[44] Hindley (Cooke 1999:156–60) discusses the creative–destructive operations of the Sun–Apollo in different contexts for Aschenbach, and the musical connection between mother and child (Lady of the Pearls and Tadzio) in *Venice*. This echoes the situation in *Grimes*.
[45] Cf. Britten's sixth *Donne* sonnet setting, 'Since she whom I loved'.

Man alone
Has a soul to save,
And goes to church
To worship on a Sunday.
II.1, Fig. 5

4. CONGREGATION
Now that daylight fills the sky
We lift our hearts to God on High
That He in all we do or say
Would keep us free from harm today.
[...]
So we, when this day's work is done,
And shades of night return once more
Amen.
II.1, Fig. 7, opening hymn as Ellen sings to John on the beach

(This reference is ironic given Ellen's imminent discovery of John's bruise, turning 'day' to 'night'.)

5. CONGREGATION
O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord
O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord
O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord,
Praise Him and magnify Him forever.

O ye Light and Darkness, bless ye the Lord
O ye Nights and Days, bless ye the Lord
O ye Lightnings and Clouds, bless ye the Lord
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.
II.1, Fig. 12, edited 'Benedicite' version

(This is sung as background to the confrontation between Ellen and Peter.)

6. ELLEN
O pity those who try to bring
A shadow'd life into the sun.[46]
II.1, Fig. 32[5], Ellen's protestation against the Borough

Such distinctions of light and darkness can also be found in the six Interludes of the opera: Interludes I, II and III are identified by Britten in his concert-

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[46] Cf. the reference to the 'sun' as symbolic of resurrection in 'Futility', *War Requiem*.

suite designations 'Dawn', 'Sunday Morning' and 'Moonlight' respectively. This would align them with Ellen's essential element. The remaining Interludes have long been considered descriptive of Grimes himself: II is designated 'Storm' in the concert suite and the great Passacaglia (Interlude IV) and so-called 'Mad Interlude' (VI) are clearly descriptive of his psychological condition.[47] That they are 'dark' Interludes needs little further comment.

Act II scene 1 is the crux of the following musical analysis, drawing in salient features of the opera relevant to the thesis. (Much else in *Grimes* is discussed later.)

3. Prologue: Peter's and Ellen's difference defined

Keller identifies both Ellen Orford and the music of the Prologue as Peter's only 'friends'.[48] As Peter is arrayed before the inquest, Britten imbues him with music that has been related to the Christ of Bach's Passions. Similarly the Borough has music similar to Bach's 'babble choruses' for the persecuting mob.[49]

Britten is not necessarily trying to make Peter into a Christ-type – Peter's Messianic delusions in his altercations with Ellen (II.1) make this much clear. Ellen, like Peter, is also the focus of Borough persecution – the 'babbling chorus' at the inquest is directed against her too. Rather the Borough's

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[47] Mitchell–Keller 1952:122.
[48] *Ibid.*:112.
[49] Walsh (John 1983:20); Matthews (Brett 1983:136); Kennedy 1981/93:159.

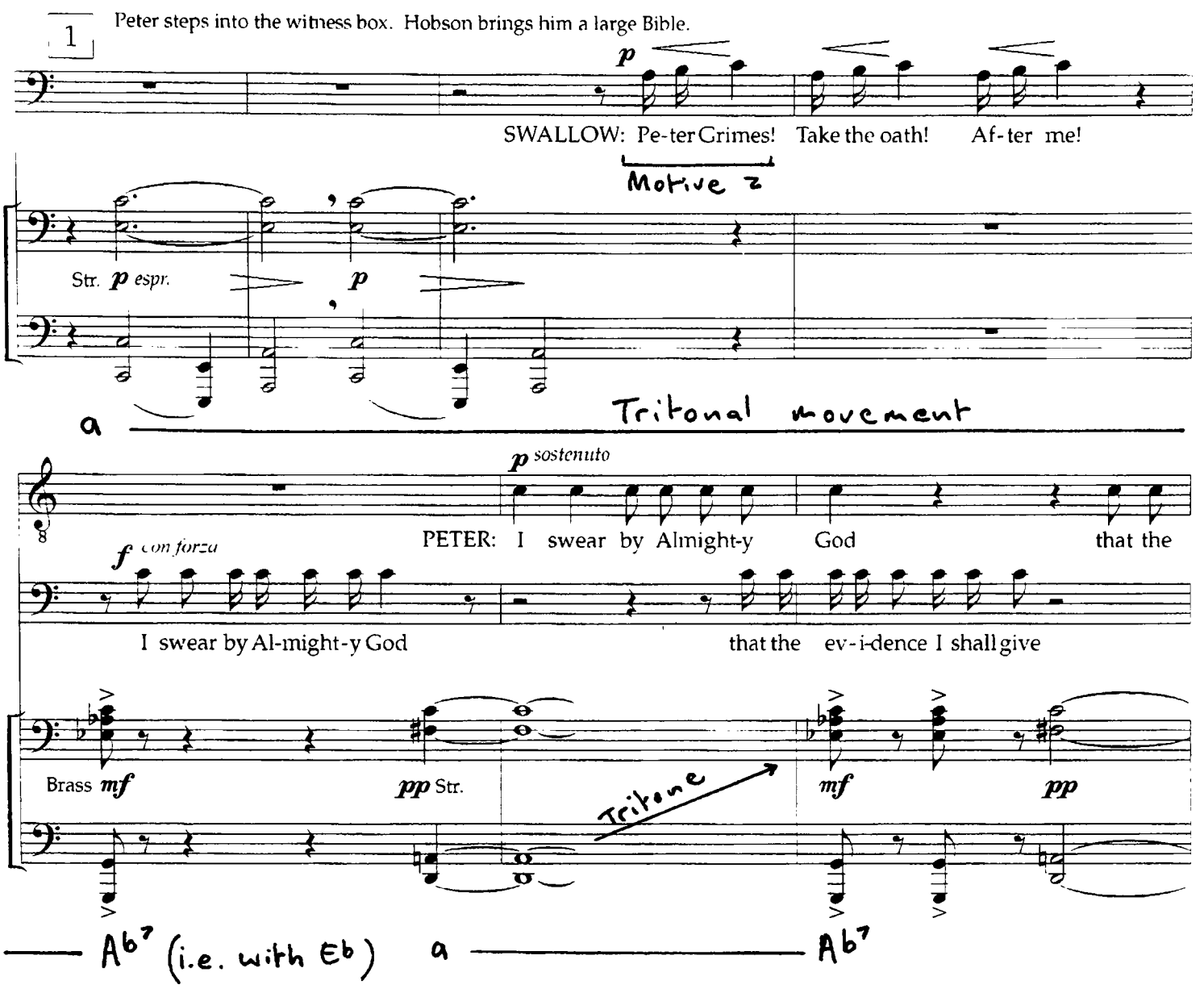
hypocritical blindness deafens them (unlike Ellen) to the potential of Christ in Peter (cf. Billy Budd). The difference between the lawyer Swallow's and Peter's recitation of the oath on the 'large Bible' emphasizes this. The religious significance of this 'official' moment carries greater emotional weight for Peter, introducing his capacity for the spiritual tensions upon which the opera will dilate (Ex. 2, i). The monotone here can be related back to the Cronies of *Bunyan* and forward to Peter's own 'Great Bear and Pleiades' aria (I.2, cf. Ex. 1, iv).

It may be claimed that Ellen hears all this as we do (i.e. that within the opera she represents a stratum of Britten's narrative voice, especially as she is the nearest thing the opera has to a pacifist). In respect of this narrative quality Ellen's music forms an important component of the opera's judgement rhetoric.[50] This becomes particularly clear in Ellen's simultaneous closeness to and distance from Peter's music in the Love Duet, flowing from the end of the Prologue into Interlude I that opens Act I and closes the opera.

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[50] Rupprecht 2001:283. 'The most significant symbolism of guilt is that which is attached to the theme of tribunal. The tribunal is a public institution; but metaphorically transposed into the internal forum, it becomes what we call the "moral consciousness"' (Ricoeur 1974:429).

Ex. 2, i. *Grimes*, Prologue, the taking of the oath (Figs. 1–2)



Continued over



4. Love Duet

The expressive force of Interlude I – on the dramaturgical as well as the descriptive level – flows from the Love Duet (Ex. 2, ii). It is Peter's and Ellen's music as much as a description of 'Dawn'.

In one of Britten's earlier drafts of the opera (L.14) he had written in pencil at the end of the Prologue:

> Peter is left alone on the scene, Ellen returns, comforts him, & there is a short love duet – tentative at first & then warming.[51]

This progression is musically realized in the transformation of the opening bitonality of the Love Duet into the closing unison leading into Interlude I.

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[51] Cited Brett (Banks 1996/2000:97, fn. 20).

The semitonal nature of the bitonal tension, Peter in f minor and Ellen in Lydian E, has important ramifications for the exclusive juxtaposition of the pitches F and E in the chorus, 'Talk of the Devil and there he is! Grimes is waiting his apprentice' (I.2, Figs. 75 *et seq.*) and the furious orchestral outbursts between the climactic choral shouts of condemnation 'Peter Grimes' (III.1, Figs. 42–43[3]). The tension between f minor and E is also that of Britten's setting of 'War in Heaven' in *The Company of Heaven* (1937, cf. Ex. 7. xi, a) and the chronologically contrasted keys of E for Billy in *Budd* (e.g. I.1, Fig. 33, 'Farewell old Rights o' Man!') and f minor for Claggart (e.g. Fig. 35). This specific bitonality – of E major and f minor(/major) – is also that of Aschenbach's opening music in *Venice*, where f and E compete in juxtaposition between his states of mind. (See also the E–F of the vocal lines of the 'evil' Cronies in *Bunyan*, Ex. 1, iv.) The complex associations in each case, between imminent erotic attraction and spiritual crisis deployed through semitonal tension, is clear. In *Grimes* this semitonal aspect is finally transposed to the 'fog-horn' E^{b}–D accompanying Peter's 'Mad Scene' (III.3).

Peter is won over to Ellen's E major in the concluding 'warming' unison in a span of melody which has been identified as the Theme of Hope.[52] Britten's drafts, L.15 (fol. 7^{v}) and (fol. 7^{r}), show that Peter's 'coming over' to Ellen's key of E is balanced by Ellen's 'coming over' into Peter's words (i.e. 'Your/My voice out of the pain'), indicating a shared mustard-

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[52] Kovnatskaya (Reed 1995:175).

seed faith.[53] The development of this Theme of Hope motive has been traced through I.1.[54] Minor ninth forms connect the deaths of the apprentices with the stressed form of the Love Duet unison (Fig. 41 *et seq.*). Later major ninth forms are connected with Peter's fantasy of a peaceful life with Ellen ultimately smothered by his unrepentant pride, indicated by the Broken Dream Theme form of Interlude II (Figs. $^{1}49$ and $^{1}60$):[55]

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[53] Plate 'Prologue, 7^{r}' (Banks 1996/2000).

[54] Kovnatskaya (Reed 1995:172–85).

[55] Kokvnatskaya (*Ibid.*) and Wintle 1991:20 also link Verdi's 'kiss' *leitmotive* in *Otello* with this form.

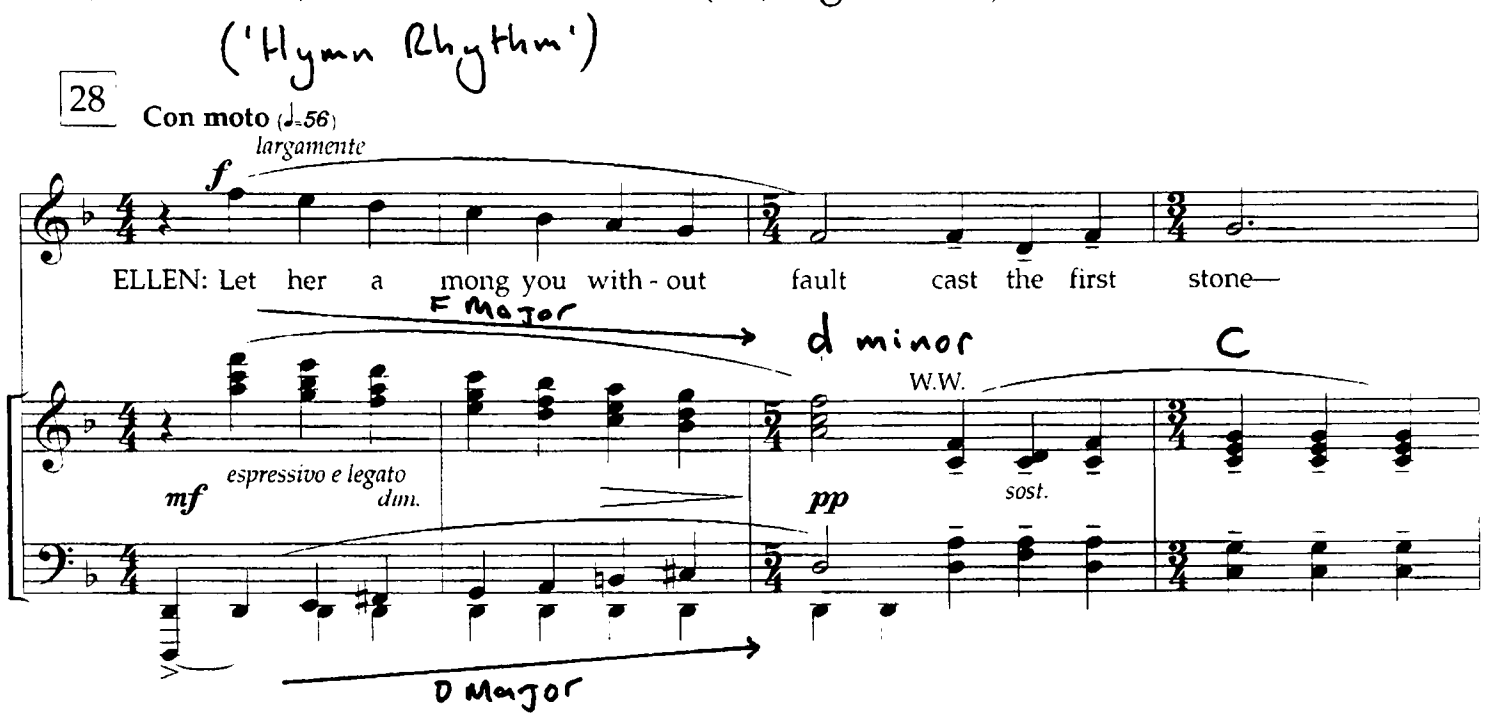
Ex. 2, ii. *Grimes*, Prologue, Love Duet



5. Ellen's Aria (I.1)

Ellen's symbiotic connection with Christ in her first aria has been shown. Her music is redolent of the Britten's oratorio-like manner of the moments identified in *Bunyan*:

Ex. 2, iii. *Grimes*, Ellen Orford's Aria (I.1, Figs. 28–29)



That the 'Gospel light' (Boles' term) Ellen represents illumines even the world of sleep, as her aria text later indicates, is notable given the importance of the theme of 'sleep' to Britten as an alternative to Christian salvation (e.g. the progression in the *Serenade* (1943) from sin in the Blake 'Elegy'; Judgement in the 'Lyke Wake Dirge'; the Classical paradigm of Johnson's 'Hymn to Diana'; and the 'nescient sleep' absolving the unrepentant conscience in Keats' 'Sonnet').

The gentle bitonality of Ellen's accompaniment, D against F conflated into a coloured d minor, is the same 'peaceful' combination as that of the earlier concluding 'Requiem aeternam' of the *Sinfonia* (Fig. 40 *et seq*. Ex. 1, viii, c). Also the progression from D (Lydian) to F mirrors the conclusion of

War Requiem where, it may be argued, a soprano 'angel' sings a kind of 'benediction' upon the two sleeping male soloists. In all cases the melodies are composed in Britten's 'hymn-rhythm' style.[56] Ellen's apparent secondary role in the action should not obscure the powerful influence of her impact dramaturgically (cf. the oratorio-like moments in *Bunyan*), Britten's musical verisimilitude for her spiritual humility being rarely so telling and its cumulative groundswell so catastrophic for Peter.

Cadence points of C, c, F, and A mark out a clear emotional essence beneath Ellen's humility. These touch upon key areas, especially D, C and A that belong to her provenance (if not Providence) elsewhere in the opera, sevenths on D providing a link with Grimes' music in the Prologue and his final 'Mad Scene' (III.2). It can be inferred that although *Grimes* is not 'in A', it may well be 'about A' – a point equally true of *Venice*.[57]

The triads and 'hymn-rhythm' evoked by the aria anticipate those of the Womens' Quartet (II.1) and Interlude V, contrasted with the turbulence of a majority of the music Britten gives to Grimes and the Borough.

6. Act II scene 1

The fusion of liturgically and orientally derived music in the Church scene opening Act II is particularly interesting in relation to the *Bunyan* Prologue

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[56] Evans 1979/96:106.
[57] *Ibid.*:136.

and later techniques employed in *Noye's Fludde* and the Church Parables.[58] In *Grimes* the application of these techniques is greatly expanded from *Bunyan*. Here Ellen Orford, whose essential element throughout Act I has been the 'sun-day-light', is introduced by 'Sunday morning' Interlude (III) in bright music utilising stratified textures and the pentatonic *selisir* mode employed in Balinese gamelan (e.g. A–C#–D–E–G#, cf. Tadzio's Theme in *Venice*, Ex. 11, ii, a).[59] The stratified layering of Interlude III has a clear precedent in Interlude I. The inter-connection of the three forms of what will be identified as the Ellen Theme, between Interlude I and III, is dramaturgically important for several reasons:[60]

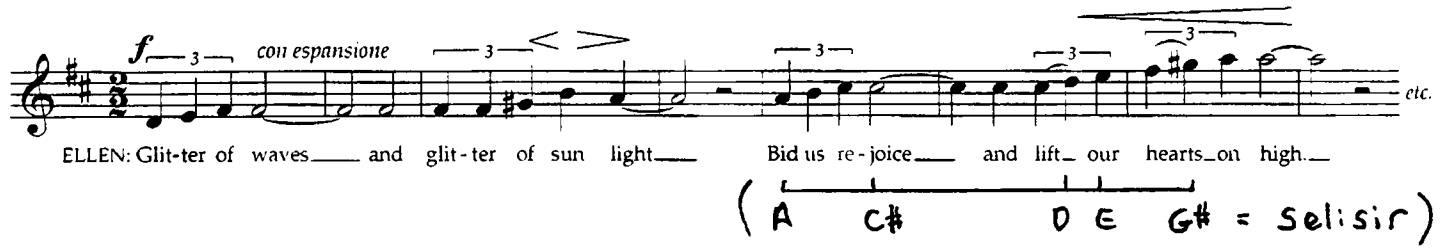
Ex. 2, iv, a. Ellen Theme, first form (Interlude I: Hope with Peter)



Ex. 2, iv, b. Ellen Theme, second form (Interlude II: Peter's psychological rejection of Ellen/redemption)



Ex. 2, iv, c. Ellen Theme, prime form (Interlude III: Ellen's spirituality)



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[58] Britten's *If thou wilt ease thine heart* (1942, Beddoes), in which heterophonic fragments in the piano evoke sea, sun and death, after which 'alone, amid the beaming/ Of love's stars, thou'll meet her/ In eastern sky' resonates in Peter's relationship with Ellen.

[59] Cooke 1998:34, 36, 45, 47.

[60] Matthews (Brett 1983:124–25) first identified these themes. Britten's *Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes* reordering clarify these connections: I. 'Dawn'; III. 'Sunday Morning'; V. 'Moonlight'; II. 'Storm'.

The third example (c) is identified as the Ellen Theme prime form because of Britten's specific connection in spite of its later chronological placement.[61] (Britten commented on Verdi's writing 'apparently unrelated phrases, which repeated hearings discover to have an enormous tension deep below the surface'.)[62]

Mitchell's connection between Britten's storm music opening the film *Love From a Stranger* (1937), describing the psychological condition of the serial killer Gerald Lovell, with *Grimes* Interlude II has gestural ramifications for the effect of violent chromatic constriction on the Ellen Theme in Interlude II (Fig. 17, Ex. 2, iv, b).[63] This can reasonably be posited as a premonition in Peter's psyche of his physical brutalisation of Ellen in II.1. There is also an Ellen Motive:

Ex. 2, v, a. The Ellen Motive (Interlude III, instrumental form)



Ex. 2, v, b. The Ellen Motive (vocal form, transposed)

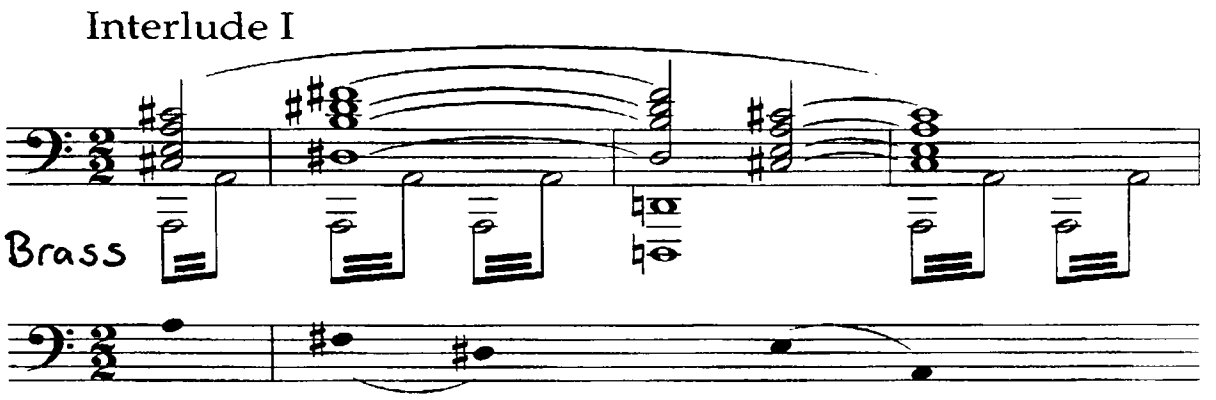


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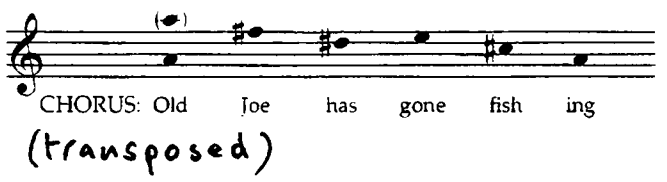
[61] D. Cooke identifies this melody as 'expressing the innocence and purity of angels and of children' (1959:151–54).
[62] Blyth 1981:9–10.
[63] Banks 1996/2000:129–32.

This is inverted as the Peter Motive:

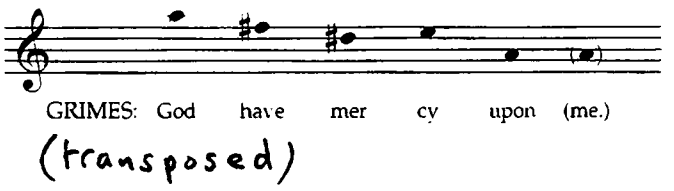
Ex. 2, vi, a. Peter Motive, first 'embedded' form (Interlude I: Hope with Ellen)



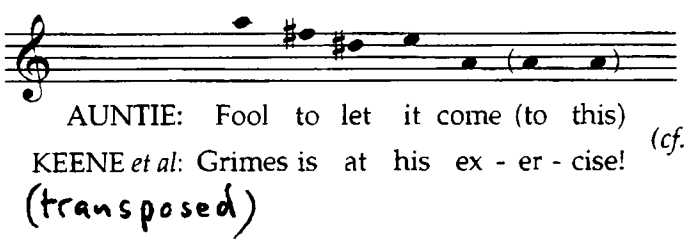
Ex. 2,vi, b. Peter Motive, second 'prophecy' form (I.2, round theme, Grimes caught in his pride)



Ex. 2, vi, c. Peter Motive, prime 'fulfilment' form (the collapse of Peter's spirituality and his 'descent into hell')

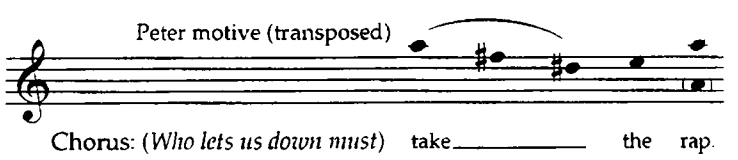


Ex. 2, vi, d. Peter Motive, third 'sinful' form



(cf. also ground rhythm of Int. IV)

Ex. 2, vi, e. Peter Motive, fourth 'pronouncement' form



Ex. 2, vi, f. Peter Motive, fifth 'condemnation' form (verbally related to Hobson's calling for 'Peter Grimes' at the opening of the Prologue inquest[64])



The Peter Motive prime form is explicitly revealed as an inversion of the Ellen Theme precisely at the point Peter brutally rejects Ellen, with all that implies.[65]

Slater's original text 'To hell then' in the composition sketch, prefacing the Peter Motive prime form ('And God have mercy upon me!'), is related to the 'hidden' Creed text adumbrated by the horns (i.e. 'And [Christ] descended into hell'). 'To hell then' became 'So be it', aligned with the Borough's off-stage 'Amen.'[66] However the original connection is preserved in Peter's 'Mad Scene' directed, perhaps, at Ellen and the Borough mob respectively (III.2, Fig. 50):

> PETER
> To hell with all your mercy.
> To hell with all your revenge.
> And God have mercy upon you!

The unfolding of the Peter Motive through the round song of I.2 is particularly notable, a connection made clear in the close conjunction of 'Old Joe has gone fishing' with 'And God have mercy upon you' in Peter's 'Mad Scene' (III.2, Figs. 49 and 50[4]). The sinister references to 'Old Joe/Young

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[64] Rupprecht 2001:32-74 connects the name 'Peter Grimes' to the operas judgement rhetoric.
[65] Compare the Peter Motive with Essex's lethally proud 'Overcome Tyrone' (*Gloriana*, Ex. 5, iii), itself derived from Elizabeth's Crownèd Rose Theme.
[66] Britten similarly excised Owen's 'hell' location from 'Strange Meeting' (*War Requiem*).

Joe/You Know has gone fishing', respectively implying Grimes, his apprentice and the devil, cross-references the chorus' earlier 'Talk of the devil and there he is, Grimes is waiting his apprentice' and Grimes' own successive 'When I/he/You Know'd gone fishing'. Peter's reference to 'Davy Jones' in his contribution to the song, links hell with the depths of the sea (traditionally 'Old Davy Jones' locker' in fisherman parlance).[67] Ellen's later 'After the storm will come a sleep like oceans deep' on discovering the wound on John's neck, directly connects this symbolism of the Act I storm with Grimes' rejection of salvation, revealed moments later. Peter's final suicide at sea is ominously in keeping with this symbolic trajectory.[68]

The Ellen Motive has been specifically identified as an example of Britten's use of the (pentatonic) *selisir* mode (having implications for the 'inverted' Peter Theme, to which a tritone is added).[69] Britten's early juxtaposition of oriental techniques with 'Christian' contexts (cf. *Bunyan* Prologue also) anticipates *Noye*, the Church Parables, Owen Wingrave's Peace Aria and *Venice*. The gestural symbolism of an unattainable 'religious state' to which an illicit erotic element is adjunct is discernable.

Religious contrast in Interlude III is enhanced by musical contrast between the bell-like Lydian D 'ground' of the opening horns, made up of major seconds and thirds, and the oppressive church bells' Phrygian E^{b}

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[67] Cf. 'Davy Jones lying below,/ So pray to the Devil below' (*Budd*, shanty, I.3, Fig. 83^{5}).
[68] Grimes' 'assisted suicide' carries overtones of Scriptural judgement (Matt. 18:6). Brett (Banks 1996/2000:56 and fn. 8) cites Isherwood's declining Britten's invitation to be the *Grimes* librettist because he found the story 'homophobic'. Britten replied 'incidentally a lot of your hints [...] have proved useful – thank you!'
[69] Cooke 1998:34 (e.g. A–C#–D–E–G#).

against D at Fig. 6 (earlier B^b against A, the flat sixth relation in D) as the curtain rises. The 'horn bells' of Ellen's music are 'noumenal' (i.e. only heard by the audience); the church bells (and organ) are 'phenomenal' (i.e. heard by both the audience and those in the opera, as are the round song of I.2 and dance music of III.1).[70] Lydian D pulling towards A is also characteristic of the *Donne Sonnets* 'At the round earth's imagined corners', where an initial vision of the resurrection is gradually countered by *Grimes*–like flattening, dimming the heavenly vision in a context of non-repentance.

Britten appears to have been attracted to the dissonant effect of the piano 'gong strokes' against pentatonic material in 'Taboeh teloe' of McPhee's *Balinese Ceremonial Music* for two pianos.[71] This dissonance is strikingly employed by Britten to indicate the crushing difference of the Church bells from Ellen's and John's pentatonically infused music combined with the bell-like horn ground.[72] Although Ellen and the church are ostensibly of the same religious designation (i.e. the music shares the Balinese gamelan source) there is, very pointedly, a dissonance between the well-springs of that spirituality: Ellen is Christ-like, Borough religion is complacently denominational, empty ritual, 'the club'.

Ellen is in the Borough, but not of it. Her 'Shall we not go to church this Sunday, but do our knitting by the sea' Ellen Motive emphasizes this

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[70] Abbate 1991 and Rupprecht 2001:312, fn. 27.These techniques relate to extradiagetic and diagetic film music techniques, Britten's earlier film work as important as the traditional operatic church scene precedents.
[71] Cooke 1998:34.
[72] The 'flat' bells pull against the 'hope for the future, symbolized by the bright morning.' Matthews (Brett 1983:126).

difference (Ex. 2, v, b). Such tensions are also experienced through flattening inflections in the musical fabric from the beginning of Interlude III (e.g. C naturals and E^b in the woodwind figure, E^b registering as an 'alien' tritone in A, later absorbed melodically in the Peter Motive) and through the disjunct bass line accompanying Ellen's arioso at Fig. 5. However both Ellen's genuinely Christian unconditional love for Peter and the socially acceptable fake Christianity of the Borough embodied in the Balinese gamelan-like Interlude III music, are ultimately unattainable by Peter himself. He is outsider to both fake and real Christianity, a predicament that extends to Aschenbach in *Venice*.

Tritonal opposition also indicates Ellen's difference from the Borough, grounded in the opera's primary tritonal pitches A (Ellen) against E^b (the Borough). Her on-stage duet with the silent apprentice against the Borough's off-stage hymn emphasizes this tritonal tension (Figs. 7–9), Ellen's music variously reflecting (enharmonic) major, minor, Phrygian and Lydian forms around A. Britten's distinction between the 'phenomenal' organ accompaniment to the off-stage service and Ellen's now distinctive harp accompaniment sonically underpins such difference.[73]

The first of a sequence of off-stage liturgical items commences as the Borough congregates. These choral items interact with Ellen's on-stage numbers forming a mutual commentary in which the religious tensions of the

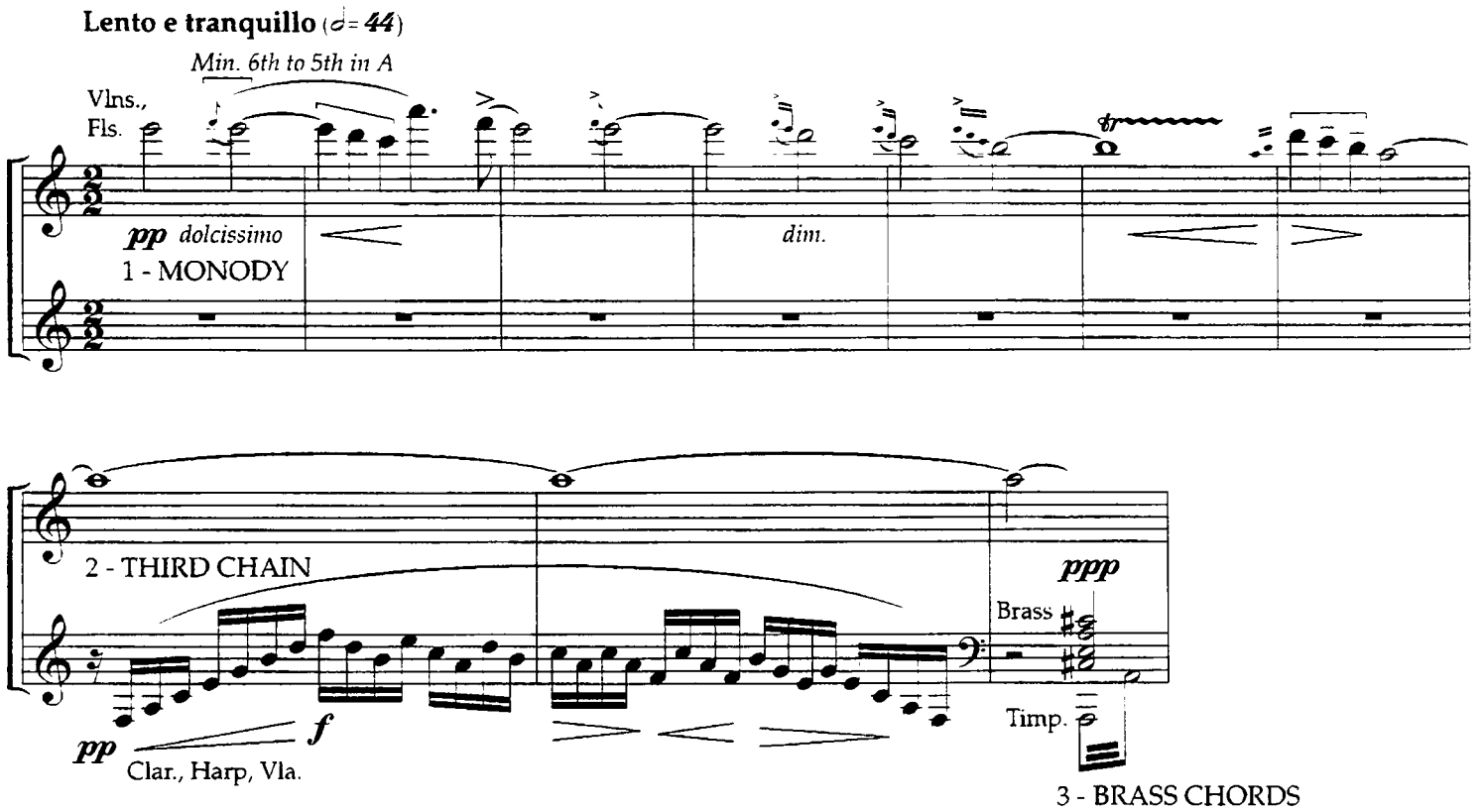
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[73] Britten's connection of the harp with Ellen (and John) recalls *A Ceremony of Carols* (1942, changed from womens to boys' voices with harp).

opera come clearly to the fore. Ellen's freely rhapsodising melodic line, vaguely shaped after the original plainsong version ('Jam lucis orto sidere') of the hymn 'Now that daylight fills the sky' that is sung in its liturgical context by the Borough, reinforces her complementary difference.[74]

As Ellen's thoughts become more reflective, Britten gently increases the chromatic content of her vocal line until her expressive semitonal appoggiaturas recall the distinct flavours of the Interlude 1 monody (e.g. 'and empty' at Fig. 8; 'of knowing children' at Fig. $8^{\sharp}$; and especially the clinching $G^{\flat}$–F over a chord of $b^{\flat}$ minor at 'Found the woes of little people' and 'but are more simple', Fig. $8^{5\text{-}6,\ 7\text{-}8}$). Such connections are reinforced by Britten's use of 'hymn-rhythm', also a feature of her earlier aria (I.1, compare Ex. 2, iii):

Ex. 2, vii, a. The three musical levels of Interlude I



(cf. Ex. 2, vi, a)

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[74] *Hymns Ancient and Modern* 1906:1, Hymn 1. Britten used the plainsong 'Jam lucis' as the basis for *The Prodigal Son* (cf. Ex. 9, i, c).

Ex. 2, vii, b. Ellen's arioso (II.1, Fig. 8), expressive appoggiatura



Continued over



The major/minor complex (on E^{b}) in the final phrase of Ellen's opening arioso ('Ev'ry day I pray it may be so') gently implies the testing of faith, anticipating the closing (Lydian D major/minor) bars of the Queen's prayer in *Gloriana* ('Forgive me and protect me, O God, my King', I.2, *8*, Fig. 52 *et seq.*). Such a connection, one of many between Ellen and Elizabeth, is particularly

striking if one takes the view that both women are ultimately betrayed by the men they love.

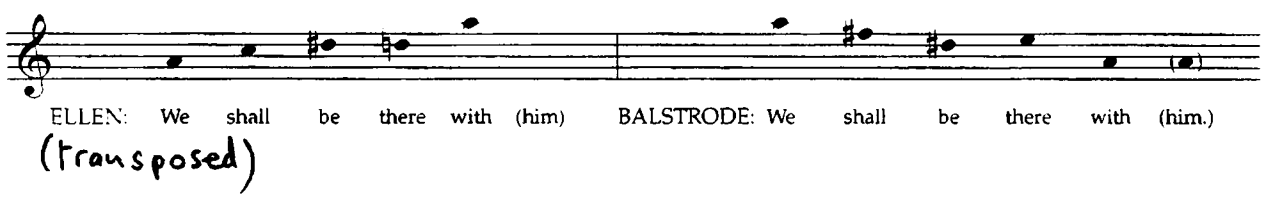
The Rector's shift to B against the E^{b} major triad at the beginning of the 'Responses' (Figs. 9–10) may be heard as a continuation of that expressive flat-sixth appoggiatura which has now become so distinctive of Ellen's musical manner. (This appoggiatura also constitutes the *Budd* 'Agony Motive' associated with Vere, Ex. 4, iii, a–f). Ellen's agonized recognition 'There's a tear in your coat. Was that done before you came? Badly torn' subsequently sustains this appoggiatura, more or less, until the beginning of the 'Gloria' at Fig. 10. (In the simultaneous B major context, G is another flat-sixth relation.) The sustained pedal B string trill is dramaturgically telling. It is the semitonal Phrygian colouring that so powerfully conveyed the tension of the storm music (I.2), complete with enharmonic 'storm key' of e^{b} minor in Ellen's vocal line (transforming the previous E^{b} major). These 'flattening' characteristics register in opposition to the 'sunny' Lydian mode opening II.1, implying Peter's imminent stormy arrival in a single sound image:

> RECTOR (and off-stage chorus)
> Saying after me
> (with congregation)
> Almighty and most merciful Father,
> We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep...
> And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.

(A similar effect is felt in the Queen's entry on a 'bright' G major against the prevailing e^{b} minor of Essex's condemnation in *Gloriana*, III.3, Fig. 156.)

The achievement of B major (Ellen) against c minor (Congregation, Fig. $^{6}10$) may be heard as an extension of the semitonal bitonality of the Love Duet (E/f) at the fifth. This is the semitonal difference between Peter and Ellen that, having rejected her, will ultimately mark Grimes' doom. Ellen's B anticipates her b minor Embroidery Aria (III.1, Figs. 23–25) and the B of her and Balstrode's statement of solidarity with Peter (III.1, *Adagio*, Fig. $^{8}26$). In this *Adagio*, Ellen and Balstrode's triple statements 'We shall be there with him' recapitulates the 'heavenly' aspiration of the Ellen Motive in clinching juxtaposition with Balstrode's gently ominous descending form of the Peter Motive.[75] (Balstrode initiates and assists Peter's suicide in III.3.) This juxtaposition is crucial to the metaphysical level of *Grimes*, indicating Ellen as quasi 'angel of life' and Balstrode as quasi 'angel of death' (cf. the later multiple baritone 'Fate/Death' roles in *Venice*):

Ex. 2, viii. Ellen Motive and Peter Motive in quasi 'angel' forms



The c minor–D major cadence patterns in the organ (Fig. $^{4}10$, 'O Lord open thou our lips') – which can be related to Ellen's I.1 aria – continue under the recitation of the 'Gloria'. Against this Ellen's B major alternates with its dominant ($F^{\#}$) and an orchestral ostinato figure based on Motive z, initiated in

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[75] The great number of double, triple and multiple repetitions of statements made in Britten's setting of text throughout *Grimes*, at least 60 triple repetitions alone, may carry some symbolic significance beyond mere emphasis (cf. the Trinitarian association of the number 3).

the Rectors' invocation 'As it was in the beginning, is now... [and ever shall be]'. This use of Motive *z* (i.e. tone-plus-semitone inscribing a minor third) lends it a certain fatalistic quality in this situation.[76] (It is also possible to absorb the ostinato into a more complex harmonic field of Lydian B with major–minor third). Storm Chords occur at Ellen's words 'torture!' and 'love'. These conjunctions underline the Storm Chord symbolism as the fear/anxiety the core of Peter's dualistic temperament in the Peter–Balstrode duet (I.1, Fig. 37 *et seq.*).[77]

This dualism is accentuated through Storm Chord precedents in 'Epilogue: Our Hunting Fathers' at the lines 'Love raging for the personal glory/ That reason's gift would add,/ The liberal appetite and power,/ The rightness of a god./ Who [...] Guessed love by nature suited to/ The intricate ways of guilt' (*Fathers*, Figs. 60–62, the chord G–C$^{\#}$–F informing the movement's rondo-like frame, Ex. 10, iv, a), and 'War in Heaven' (*The Company of Heaven*, Ex. 7, x, a).

The resurgence of the Borough's E^{b} and B^{b} at Fig. 11^{7} and the reassertion of the storm key of e^{b} minor (simultaneously Phrygian b^{b} in emphasis) against a Storm Chord at 'After the storm will come a sleep' is ominously prophetic: Ellen's drop to low B^{b} at 'in ocean's deep', her lowest note in the opera, marks out the very pitch that Peter will 'fall' to when he

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[76] Matthews (Brett 1983:145) identifies Motive *z* as the obsessive crux of the Interlude IV (Passacaglia) theme.
[77] Cooke 1998:36 relates this chord to 'fear and anxiety' and *selisir* in Britten's work.

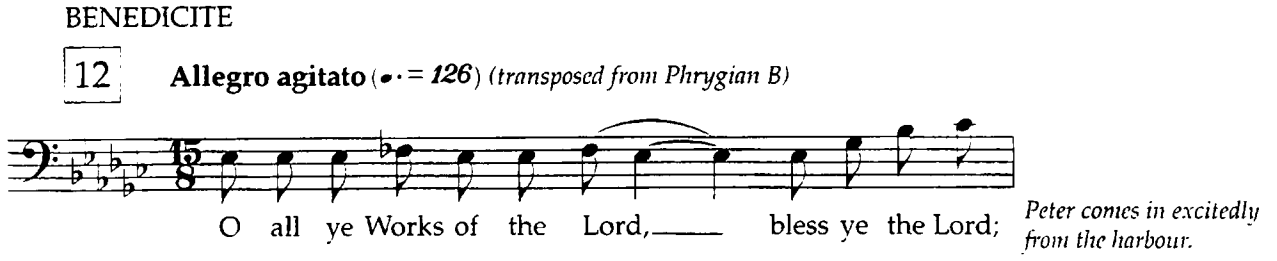
rejects her at Fig. [4]18. The e^{b} minor of 'Lyke Wake Dirge' (*Serenade*), the eighth *Donne* setting, 'Thou hast made me', the unaccompanied Quartet prior to Interlude II (*Lucretia*, the rape itself) and Essex's condemnation (*Gloriana*, III.1), accumulates associations. Each of these contexts carries an unequivocal weight of doomed suspension between heaven and hell. Scale-like passages associated with Ellen since her Act I aria abound throughout this section, only here the sharp pain of the semitonal arrangements can be acutely felt. The brief transitional oboe solo utilizes the pitches and shape of Ellen's thwarted earlier prayer.

One of the most important aspects of the grotesque 'Benedicite' (cf. the *Screw*, II.2), one that appears to have escaped critical attention, is the relationship of the choral ostinato figure to the Storm Theme of Interlude II:

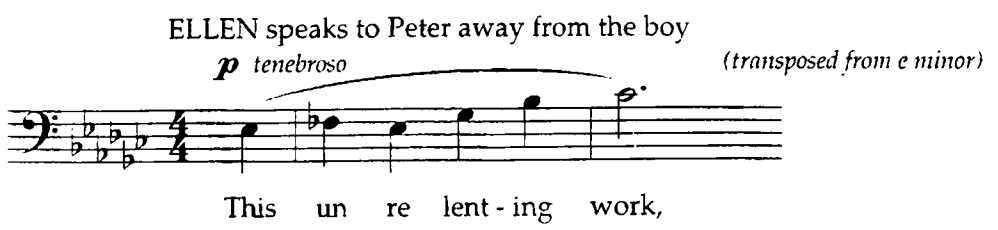
Ex. 2, ix, a. Storm Theme (Interlude II)



Ex. 2, ix, b. 'Benedicite' version



Ex. 2, ix, c. 'Ambition' version



The *selisir* outline of this repeated 'Benedicite' phrase connects it to the oriental field of the opening music of the act. However, it is precisely the Phrygian intrusion that continues to connect this music more forcefully to the Act I storm and Peter duly hastens on-stage to take John fishing. (Ellen's 'Peter, what for?', is another flat-sixth-to-fifth relation.)

Their subsequent exchange reveals that Peter is breaking a previously agreed bargain – terms set with Ellen to protect John. Sundays are to be his 'day of rest'. Later, in Ellen's account to the Borough, we learn further details (Fig. 31 *et seq.*):

> ELLEN
> To save [John] from danger
> And hardship sore, and
> Mending his clothes and giving him
> Regular meals.

It is clear that this plan was made in light of Swallow's advice to Peter in the Prologue:

> PETER
> Your honour! Like every other fisherman I have to hire and apprentice. I must have help–
>
> SWALLOW
> Then get a woman help you look after him.
>
> PETER
> That's what I want–but not yet–

It is Peter's pride, largely embodied in manifestations of Motive *z* throughout the score, which prevents him from marrying Ellen.

Balstrode tells Peter, in their Storm Chord-infused duet before Interlude II, that Ellen will marry Peter on the spot, 'without your booty'. Yet Peter responds 'No – not for pity!' In the Prologue Peter clearly states that

marriage is what he wants and it is clear that Ellen wants it too. The bargain is arranged between Ellen and Peter as a temporary concession, a concession that Peter rides roughshod over in his proud, overbearing ambition. The progressive unfolding of drama and music to this point make clear that a possible marriage cannot come from Peter's course of action.

Even the world-weary Balstrode recognizes that, without repentance on Grimes' part, 'The old tragedy/ Is in store:/New start with new prentice/ Just as before.' In Peter's own later words, 'So be it!'. He breaks the bargain with Ellen and thus, symbolically, breaks the Covenant with powerful metaphysical ramifications that Britten would subsequently explore throughout his operatic *oeuvre*.

In the key moment of this section, Ellen takes up a rhythmically augmented form of the 'Benedicite' shape (Ex. 2, ix, c above):

> ELLEN
> This unrelenting work,
> This grey unresting industry,
> What aim, what future, what peace will your hard profits buy?

The connection of Ellen's sudden flowering at the word 'peace' onto an F major triad prepares the F pedal that will be used in the 'Creed' (Fig. 16), a *credo* to which Peter's Messianic delusions make clear he will not submit. Ironically, in Ellen's melodic line, the Storm Theme-coloured 'Benedicite' phrase is used to question what appears to be Peter's obsession with the Protestant work ethic, in which Britten also apparently believed (i.e. living to

work rather than working to live).[78] The Dionysian turbulence in Grimes' proud heart was originally unleashed in the Storm Theme of Interlude II in response to Borough values:

> PETER
> They listen to money, these Borough gossips [...]
> I'll win them over.

(These connections engage with Keller's discernment of creative work as a means of 'exorcising' a sense of guilt discussed in Chapter One.)

Ellen's vision, revealed in the warm E major of the Love Duet (Ex. 2, ii), is equable: love and work will complement each other. This is explicitly bound up, both culturally and naturally, in Ellen's desire to marry him. (Her 'But we'll gossip too, and talk and rest' in the Love Duet could not be taken in any other cultural context in 1945):

> ELLEN
> This is a Sunday, his day of rest.
>
> PETER
> This is whatever day I say it is!
> Come boy! [...]
> Believe in me, we shall be free.
>
> CHORUS
> I believe in God the Father Almighty,
> Maker of heaven and earth:
> And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord.

The unearthly distance of Ellen's F major 'peace' triad from Peter's world anticipates the increasing distance of the F major triad at the three *a cappella* cadence points in *War Requiem* (cf. Ex. 7, v). This distance is graphically illustrated in the semitonal clash between Peter's high $F^{\#}$ at 'free' and the

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[78] Mitchell (Banks 1999:viii).

commencement of the 26-bar pedal F at the beginning of the Creed, a point also extending to the growing difference between $F^{\#}$ and F in the *War Requiem* examples. A true spiritual crisis is now being dramatised.

The off-stage Creed recitation over which Grimes will be 'self-rejected' is taken over by the orchestral horns. It is perhaps ironically relevant that in *Wingrave* Owen is rejected off-stage by Sir Philip in words that we cannot hear except in a purely musical manifestation on the orchestral horn (II, Fig. 216). Both Peter and Owen are not 'rejected' until they have first done the rejecting, based on a conscious and decisive choice (i.e. there is no fate without choice, cf. *Budd* and *Venice*). In *Grimes* Interlude II Britten enables us to hear those choices being made by Peter in purely musical terms. Within and over the 'Creed' of II.1, Britten makes us witness of its physical enactment.

Although this *credo* section is cast in b^{b} minor one again finds Britten utilizing Phrygian (F) possibilities to make connections with the earlier storm music. The ensuing function of this F as a dominant of b^{b} has a precedent in *Bunyan* (II.1, 23, The Fight). This occurs in F opening the fight between Helson and Paul into the b^{b} of the Love Duet between Tiny and Slim (Fig. 6), which becomes B^{b} in the Hymn (Fig. 17, the keys of b^{b}–F also commence and close the concluding Litany, their reversal in *Grimes* II.1 making for an ominous English answer to that American prayer.) This cross-reference is ironic: through an act of purgative struggle and violence (the offstage fight between Bunyan and Helson) 'love' is found both by Tiny and Slim and Paul and

Helson (Ex. 1, viii, a). However, in *Grimes* the act of physical violence between Peter and Ellen leads to disintegration and, ultimately, the suicide of Peter.

The identification by critics of the connection between Britten's pedal F and Berg's pedal B in the murder scene of *Wozzeck* is there, but the implications are unfortunate for Peter – as unfortunate as the connection between the 'storm music' of his soul and that of the serial killer in *Love from a Stranger*.[79] Britten's use of Desdemona's ensemble from Verdi's *Otello* (in which Desdemona is stuck down and later killed by Otello) as a model for the music of Ellen's explanatory ensemble with the Borough is a further negative importation for Peter's character (Figs. 31–33).[80]

Up to this point in the present chapter, the progress of *Grimes* from a tenuous but definitely possible redemption to the point of spiritual crisis has been traced. Now a survey of the enactment of a spiritual disintegration, which has been musically-psychologically prepared within Peter's music, will be undertaken. This clarifies the primary role of the Ellen character (from Crabbe) as an embodiment of the true redemptive element – operatically the 'real' Christianity – that the hypocritical Borough and its religious institutions do not offer.

Ellen's 'Peter, tell me one thing' employs the minor sixth associated with Peter's earlier request for help ('Hi! Give us a hand!' I.1, Fig. 20). This is a telling reprise of the minor sixth given the specific textual reference to Ellen's

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[79] Matthews (Brett 1983:132, 135).
[80] *Ibid.*:137–39.

hand being given/taken away as the key issue in their dynamic (cf. the Love Duet unison, Ex. 2, ii) and the prevalence of minor-sixth-to-fifth shapes in Ellen's musical manner. Peter's minor sixths at 'Believe in me!' (Fig. ^{2}16) makes the significance of this interval particularly pointed. Theoretically, if he had wanted to suggest something prying or sinisterly intrusive in Ellen's questions, Britten could have used the major sixth, which from the opening bars of the opera through Swallow's Prologue music is directly associated with Borough self-righteous pomposity. He doesn't.

Not only does Britten use the minor sixth but he expressly (and expressively) uses it in the flat-sixth-to-fifth configuration echoing the Interlude I monody and the melancholy compassion of so much of Ellen's music elsewhere. Ellen's connection with this shape is made evident through her melodic G^{b} falling through B^{b} (the equivocations between the 'disillusioned' b^{b} minor and 'faithful' Lydian G^{b} implied in Britten's setting of this range for her melody at 'where the youngster got that ugly bruise?' and 'were we right in what we planned to do?' crystallized at 'Were we mistaken when we schemed to solve your life by lonely toil?').

The accompaniment here is built out of Motive *z* (in the form G^{b}–A^{b}–F in the harp): even now, in such darkened circumstances, Ellen's vocal line is able to keep a tentative hold on her Lydian optimism, C natural in Lydian G^{b} with the staccato G^{b} major triads in the trombone accompaniment highlighting her Lydian 'constitution'. But her move to the b^{b} minor third for

her repeated question 'Were we right? Were we right?' indicates that she now, retrospectively, recognizes that they were wrong (i.e. she recognizes her human limitations in the face of Peter's intransigence).

The diminished triad on E moving to F major for Peter's 'Out of the hurly burly' (Fig. 16[5]) and 'Take away your hand!' recalling the diminished shape of the Peter Motive and anticipating its prime form in 'God have mercy' (Ex. 2, vi, c), indicates how he can only use Ellen's 'peaceful' F major triad in contexts of anger and violence – Britten's use of the diminished triad here anticipating contexts of violence and Divine judgement in the *War Requiem* 'Dies irae' and *Wingrave*.[81]

That Peter's music utilizes diminished triads as a preparation for his 'violent' F major triads, emphasized by the *sf* staccato bark of trombones and trumpets as opposed to the earlier warm *ppp* wind accompaniment under Ellen's F major 'peace' triad is tragic. He can still adopt Ellen's Lydian mode, here F, for the softening of 'My only hope depends on you if you take it away what's left?' with the fall to G^{b} at 'what's left?'. But Grimes has just used this semitonal F–G^{b} conjunction for his demand 'Take away your hand!'. The fantasy is that Grimes does not want Ellen to take away her hand, but the reality is that he does. He is too proud.

Consistent with the theme of *Fathers*, the central issue with Peter here is not so much how physical violence leads to physical murder – although that might also be implied – but how Pride leads to spiritual murder, both of

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[81] Mitchell (Cooke 1999:197–98) discusses physical blows in Britten contexts of violence.

oneself and of others. Britten's subsequent focussed exploration of the subjects of (non-) repentance and suicide in the *Donne* cycle and *Lucretia* indicate the significance of this theme in Britten's later work.

Grimes' rejection of Ellen to the cry 'God have mercy upon me!' in B^b may be connected with his later B^b setting of Canticle III: *Still Falls the Rain*. Here an extra-Biblical humanist grace is invoked for 'the self-murdered heart' after the manner of *Lucretia*, especially striking given the role of B^b in Vere's 'salvation' (*Budd*), the cleansing storm passacaglia that saves the family in *Noye*, the music of the Father and the family home in the *Prodigal* and Owen's Peace Aria in *Wingrave*.[82]

Consistent statements by Pears, the creator of Peter Grimes, place responsibility for the failure of the Peter–Ellen relationship squarely on Peter. On some level Pears' view would have reflected Britten's own:

> 1946
> [Grimes] despises the measures and complacency of the Borough, but passionately wants to make good in the Borough's way, by 'setting up household and shop'. Then he will marry Ellen. [...] He quarrels with Ellen, whom he loves.[83]
>
> 1965
> No one has thought of 'the pity' – either for the dead boy or himself – except Ellen who comes forward to try and soothe. 'Here is a friend.' But he finds it difficult to receive. For his kind receiving is even more difficult than giving. [...] Grimes is, of course, like many sensitive and only semi-articulate people, his own worst enemy; he is too much involved in his own weaknesses to be able to cure them. [...] Grimes

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[82] The lines 'Christ that each day, each night, nails there, have mercy on us-/ On Dives and on Lazarus:/ Under the Rain the sore and the gold are as one' (Sitwell) attempts to refute the Biblical account of the rich man and Lazarus where the unrepentant rich man ('Dives') is eternally cast into hell (Luke 16:19–31).
[83] Brett 1983:152.

> impatiently rejects Balstrode's advice. [...] He refuses to ask Ellen to marry him until he has made good in the world. He is proud, too proud. [...] On the stage, Grimes cannot look people in the eyes except in defiance; only Ellen is the exception. And even with her once he finds her questions too probing, he answers her over his shoulder (loudly) or from behind her back (softly). [...] Even the link of sympathy with Ellen snaps.[84]
>
> 1974
> And there is the schoolmistress, Ellen Orford, who loves him. She would do anything for him and tries to keep him on the rails. [...] [Peter] longs to accept Ellen's love but refuses – not till he is in a proper position to do so, till he has established himself. [...] Ellen keeps a kindly eye on [the apprentice] hoping secretly that her care for the boy will bring her nearer to Peter and that perhaps they will all three share a home. [...] [Grimes' striking of Ellen] is a savage and brutal act. [...] His pride, his ambition, his whole overwrought frustration, his inability to admit failure as possible, his feelings of betrayal, are all concentrated into a savage attack on his one true loving friend.[85]

In light of such comments, cynical interpretations of Ellen's motives for helping Peter can be taken as not representing the composer's view of the work. (Britten's famously typical dislike of any productions other than his own originals may be considered a factor in this respect.)

The gulf that is really fully established for the first time between Peter and Ellen is cemented in their interlocking musical phrases indicating that they are singing past each other rather that with each other.[86] It is additionally interesting to note that Ellen's melody ('Were we mistaken') is a semitone lower in the finished opera than as Britten first sketched it.[87] As such, in the finished version, the F–G^{b} semitone is emphasized, constantly

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[84] Banks 1996/2000:6.
[85] Palmer 1984:105–6.
[86] Emphasized in Britten's original sketch (H2G^{V}), Ex. 4 in Reed (Banks 1996/2000:91) where Ellen's melody is described as 'hymn-like'.
[87] *Ibid.*

relating the semitonal friction between Ellen and Peter directly to the pedal F (cf. Love Duet E–f and the minor–major ninth in the evolution of the Theme of Hope).

As shown above, F is the pivotal pitch connecting the two cycles of fifths that separate the worlds of Ellen and the Borough (and the triad that closed *Bunyan*). The presence of minor ninth and flat-sixth-to-fifth – both employing G^{b} – at Ellen's 'Were we mistaken' utilizes the associations of the Theme of Hope from the Love Duet and the expressive appoggiatura from the monody of Interlude I. Ellen's melody looks back to a time that cannot be recaptured, complementing Peter's 'Great Bear' aria (I. 2, in Ellen's E). Even here Ellen is not defensive, giving Peter a last opportunity to break down in repentant humility: 'Were we mistaken?' Humility enables her to acknowledge that failure is both possible and actual, and that Peter's blasé attitude to the harm inflicted on John in these first few days, whether intentional or 'accidental circumstances', confirms both the failure of the plan and failure to rescue the boy from the workhouse system into a better world, thereby retroactively implicating both her and Peter in its abuses.

In this sense, Ellen has committed what the ancients termed 'a noble error':

> But on the same principle he who lives for the sake of virtue, and in the hope that he will be improved by his lover's company, shows himself to be virtuous, even though the object of his affection be proved to be a villain, and to have no virtue; and if he is deceived he has committed a noble error. For he has proved that for his part he will do anything for anybody for the sake of virtue and improvement, and nothing can be

> nobler than this. Thus noble in every case is the acceptance of another for the sake of virtue.[88]

In Britten's subsequent operas explorations of such moral notions of virtue would take centre stage.

Peter's failure to be humble and redeem his losses marks the moment of spiritual disintegration. The fact that the D major fragments of his accompaniment are contained within the A major profile (A–B–C$^{\#}$–D) of the bassoon and double bassoon (against Motive *z* in the clarinets) can be related back to both the A major of the brass chordal strata of Interlude I, again implying disintegration of that hope in the new context, and the super-imposition of D and A in Ellen's different music from Borough religion in Interlude III:[89]

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[88] Plato 1999:713.
[89] Brett 1983:133.

Ex. 2, x. The moment of Grimes' spiritual disintegration



Peter answers Ellen's phrase with the major ninth – related back to the idealized Dream Theme form of the Theme of Hope (immediately prior to Interlude II). But Ellen's minor ninth (F–G^{b}) and Peter's major ninth (G^{b}–A^{b}, which Ellen briefly joins at the end of Peter's interrupting second response) again indicates that they are worlds apart. These conjoined intervals form Motive *z*, played out in the accompaniment (i.e. F–G^{b}–A^{b}), exposing the real

'Pity and the Truth' witnessed in the theatre. The importance to the rest of the opera of Peter's catastrophic revelation of the prime form of the Peter Theme in B^b as he strikes Ellen is emphatic (Exs. 2, vi, a–f):

> From the moment that Grimes renounces salvation (in everything but his actual words) the [Peter Theme] pursues him as relentlessly as ever the Furies pursued Orestes.[90]
>
> Peter, tortured by Ellen's sorrowful reproach, 'We've failed', strikes at her blindly, recognizes in his own instinctive resort to violence his damnation, and cries out.[91]

Summary

The present chapter has sought to restore the spiritual trajectory of the dramaturgy of the finished opera. Peter's unrepentant 'Faustian' rejection of redemption in Ellen for worldly vainglory based on talent and ambition harmonizes the critical tradition viewing *Grimes* as either nihilistic Classical tragedy or as a Christian moral parable.

The operatic distinction between fake Christianity (the Borough), which is critiqued by Britten, and real Christianity (Ellen), which is apparently not, will be important to later operas where Christianity, in any recognizably textual or concrete sense, will come under increasingly passive-aggressive resistance. Britten would now more closely explore this, combined with the implicit theme of Peter's non-repentance, in the first of his series of chamber operas, *The Rape of Lucretia*.

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[90] Walsh (Johns 1983:27).
[91] Evans 1979/96:113.

Chapter 3: *THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA*: Doctrine, drama, and musical 'grace'

'I've discovered that being simple and considering things spiritual of importance produce violent reactions.'[1]

Britten's and his librettist Ronald Duncan's *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946, revised 1947) is primarily based on André Obey's *Le Viol de Lucrèce*.[2] The origins of the chamber opera in a more or less singularly complete literary source than either *Bunyan* or *Grimes* afford a closer look at the process of transformation from book to libretto. It is notable that in Obey the two narrators (who are not identified by gender as they are in the opera) are not 'Christian' in any overt sense. While they narrate the first scene, they do not play an active role in the drama until later in the play (i.e. I.2, the scene with the women spinning). Britten's 'Christianisation' of *Lucretia* continues the trend in *Bunyan* and *Grimes*. It should again be pointed out, however, that such 'Christianisations' do not necessarily make Britten's operas 'Christian' – whatever that may mean in each case.[3] It would appear that for Britten the importation of a Christian element serves to heighten the spiritual and metaphysical tension of his respective dramaturgies.[4]

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[1] Britten (cited Holst 1966:40).
[2] Obey 1931/33. For other sources see Duncan 1981:57–58, and Mertz 1990.
[3] An important qualification of Keller's 'Britten takes his religion into his secular music' (Herbert 1979/89:xxvii).
[4] Fuller (2000) falls foul of this lack of distinction as well ignoring *Lucretia*'s musical paradoxes.

This chapter will begin by looking at the development of formality and naturalism in *Lucretia*. This will include a brief survey of the Classical problem of *Lucretia*, as this impinges on the Christian dimension. Britten's remaking of Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, is key to this aspect of the work, as he is legally the source of Lucretia's redemption, or otherwise. This will be seen to have important implications for Lucretia's suicide and her concomitant lack of repentance and salvation (i.e. as opposed to repression).

1. Formality and Naturalism in *Lucretia*

Throughout *Lucretia* Britten employs a number of ritual forms for certain texts and actions. In a discussion noting the matching of 'formalism–naturalism' and 'Christian–pagan' imagery it has been noted:

> It is the loss of virtue, not the loss of innocence, which destroys [Lucretia], and she swings between restraint and passion as disconcertingly as the drama swings between the formalized and the naturalistic.[5]

The 'Christian–pagan' connection to 'formalism–naturalism' is a new and decisive manifestation in *Lucretia* of Britten's earlier treatment of Apollonian restraint against Dionysian passion in relation to the sacred–profane dualism at his aesthetic core. His comparison between Wagner's and Stravinsky's aesthetic transformations of religious ideas in 1936 indicates his interest in the balance between sensuality and ritual in religious contexts (see Chapter 1):

> –Wagner: 'sensuous, incense, ritual, beauty of sound, emotion'
> –Stravinsky: 'moral, psychological, but also ritual'

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[5] Whittall 1982/90:114.

Britten's discernment implies the equation of Dionysian qualities with Wagner and the Apollonian with Stravinsky, but with ritual as a significant connection (cf. *Venice*, where the Apollonian is shown to repress the Dionysian). It is certainly interesting that *Lucretia* is, harmonically at least, Britten's closest opera to neoclassical Stravinsky.

The swings between the naturalistic and formalized in *Lucretia* are considerably more integrated than those of *Bunyan* and *Grimes* precisely because the ritual manifestations are not linked, in any discernable way, to precise liturgical models. The exception is the chorale melody for Male and Female Chorus during Interlude II, designed to act as a kind of spiritual palliative to the violent instrumental description of the rape itself.

Britten's later merging of plainsong with techniques derived from Asian music sources in the Church Parables is a further development of this technical aspect of *Lucretia*: whereas, in the opera, a non-liturgically derived 'hymn' first heard in the Prologue generates the two primary Lucretia and Tarquinius Motives, in the parables most of the melodic-harmonic forms are derived from plainsong, with demonstrable precedents in (Catholic) liturgical dramatic types (e.g. the Medieval liturgical drama and Vernacular sacred play traditions). However, in one respect the 'hymn' does function like the plainsong in the later Parables in that it presents raw melodic materials (harmonically they are present from the opening of the opera) and contracts those elements back again in the Epilogue statement.

Britten's decision to design *Lucretia* in a more decisively formal manner than *Grimes*, suggested by Obey's precedent, was significantly affected by the incorporation of Christian paradigms. The overt Catholic reference to the Virgin Mary as the object of prayer for intercession in the Interlude II chorale obstructs the view that we are encouraged to divorce the presentation of Christianity from its institutional manifestations in *Lucretia*.[6] Britten's fusion of 'Catholic' text with 'Protestant' chorale melody in this 'rape' interlude is striking in itself.

In light of his 1936 observation of the 'ritual' connection between (Dionysian) Wagner and (Apollonian) Stravinsky, it is notable that in *Lucretia* there is a subtle interaction of ritual forms supporting religious ideas and the ritualization of pagan episodes in the dramatic action which are not directly related to the religious ideas in themselves (e.g. compare the 'Good night' sequence, I.2, Fig. 93 *et seq.*, especially 97, with Exs. 1, viii, a-c, and the disturbing gestural implications behind such connections as Tarquinius and Lucretia retire to bed).[7] This use of ritual to bridge Christian and pagan elements can be considered Britten's attempt to merge the fields of 'guilty innocence' at a formal level, reflecting the intra-thematic merging of the 'hymn' melody with later pagan motives.

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[6] *Pace* Brett (Fortune 1987: 353–65). Early comment referred to *Lucretia* as 'neo-Catholic' (Gray cited Duncan 1981:168).

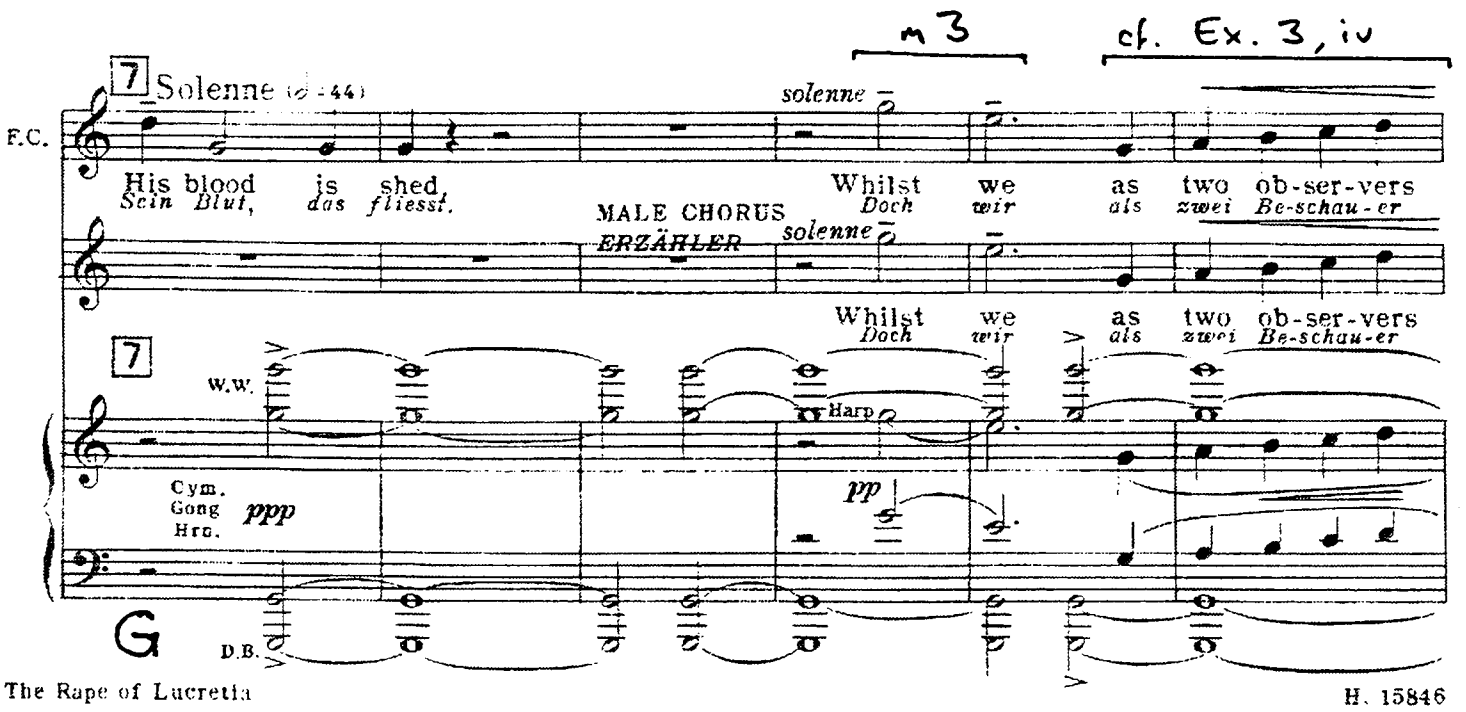
[7] Further examples of Britten's use of ritual in pagan/secular contexts include the male drinking song (I.1); Tarquinius' ride to Rome (Int. I); female spinning music (I.2); choral political chanting (II.1, opening); and passacaglia (II.2, Fig. 95 *et seq.*).

The most significant single ritual forms specifically engaging with Christian ideas over the larger frame of *Lucretia* are for the Male and Female Chorus: the 'hymn' that occurs three times (I.1, Fig. 7; II.1, Fig. 12; II.2, Fig. 107) and the chorale melody sung during the 'rape' Interlude (II). Britten also employs a recurring, specific, Melodic Theme which equivocates between Christian notions of sin and Classical notions of 'fate' that rationalize sin.

a. The 'Hymn' and 'Rape Chorale'

The 'hymn' is not related to any discernable liturgical precedent. Britten's use of major-minor third equivocation lends the melody a designedly ambiguous air at odds with the Christian affirmations of the Epilogue:

Ex. 3, i. The 'hymn' (I.1, Fig. 7)



Continued over



This ambiguity can be contrasted with the close of *A Boy was Born* (1933), arguably the final work unequivocally affirming the religious beliefs of Britten's youth. (In 1936, the year of *Fathers*, Britten wrote of the choral cycle:

> I cannot promise that I shall go on 'like that' [...] always. One grows up, I find. And even now after four years or so I find that there is a lot in the work one wouldn't do nowadays.[8]

The sense of cultivated major–minor equivocation between Pride and Charity in the *Fathers* motto and *Bunyan* Prologue can be sensed in the 'hymn' as a moral dilemma. This sense is heightened by a connection with the coda of Inkslinger's Song (*Bunyan* I.2), which appears as a musical proto-type of the 'hymn' (Ex. 3, ii).

The first 'hymn' appearance is based on a pedal G, a direct connection with Inkslinger's coda, being built on a pedal G (major triad). They also share Lydian colourings, bare octave doublings of the voice(s), and the modal equivocation of the suspended, hymn-like melodic span. The shapes of the 'hymn' generate the Lucretia and Tarquinius Motives, which are entirely ambiguous regarding their mutual musical economy. This ambiguity implies a moral complexity shared by Inkslinger's implicit homosexuality, a point enhanced by the interlocking minor thirds and the significant expressive role of Motive *z* in Inkslinger's melodic line:

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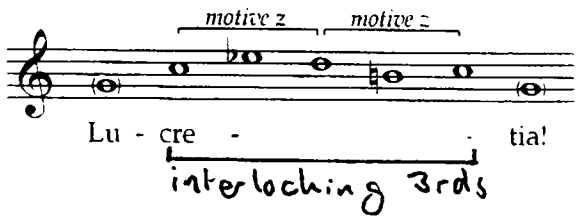
[8] Mitchell–Reed 1991:1333.

Ex. 3, ii. *Bunyan*, Inkslinger's Song (*14*, Fig. 6 *et seq.*)

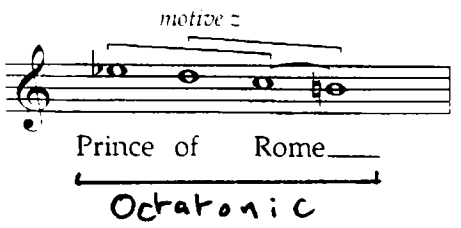


Motive *z* is later revealed as the Rape Motive, in which the horns 'brassed' $D^{\#}$ penetrates the oboes $C^{\#}$–E in quasi-sexual symbolism:[9]

Ex. 3, iii, a. The Lucretia Motive



Ex. 3, iii, b. The Tarquinius Motive

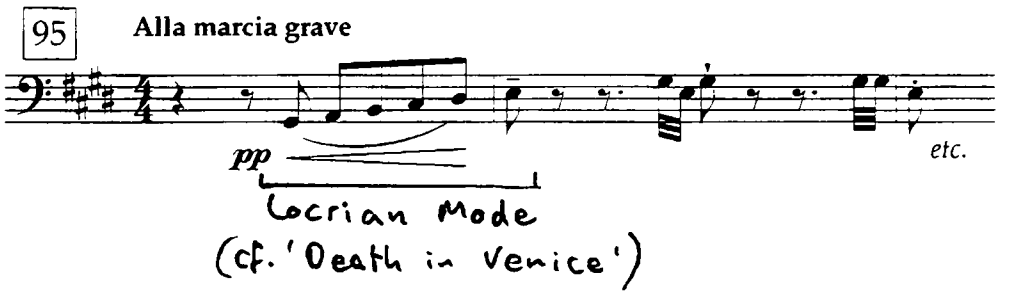


Ex. 3, iii, c. The Rape Motive



Additional ambiguity surrounds the six-note ascending figure of the hymn with anacrusis ('[Whilst we] as two observers stand') in relation to the ground of the passacaglia over Lucretia's body at the *dénouement*:

Ex. 3, iv. The passacaglia ground



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[9] White 1970/83:151; Evans 1979/96:135. 'Motive *z*' is named the 'parent cell' of Lucretia by Mitchell–Keller 1952:137, fn. 2.

The first two statements of the 'hymn' share the same Christian text at roughly the same juncture in the two respective acts. Between the first two statements of the hymn and the last comes the 'rape' chorale:

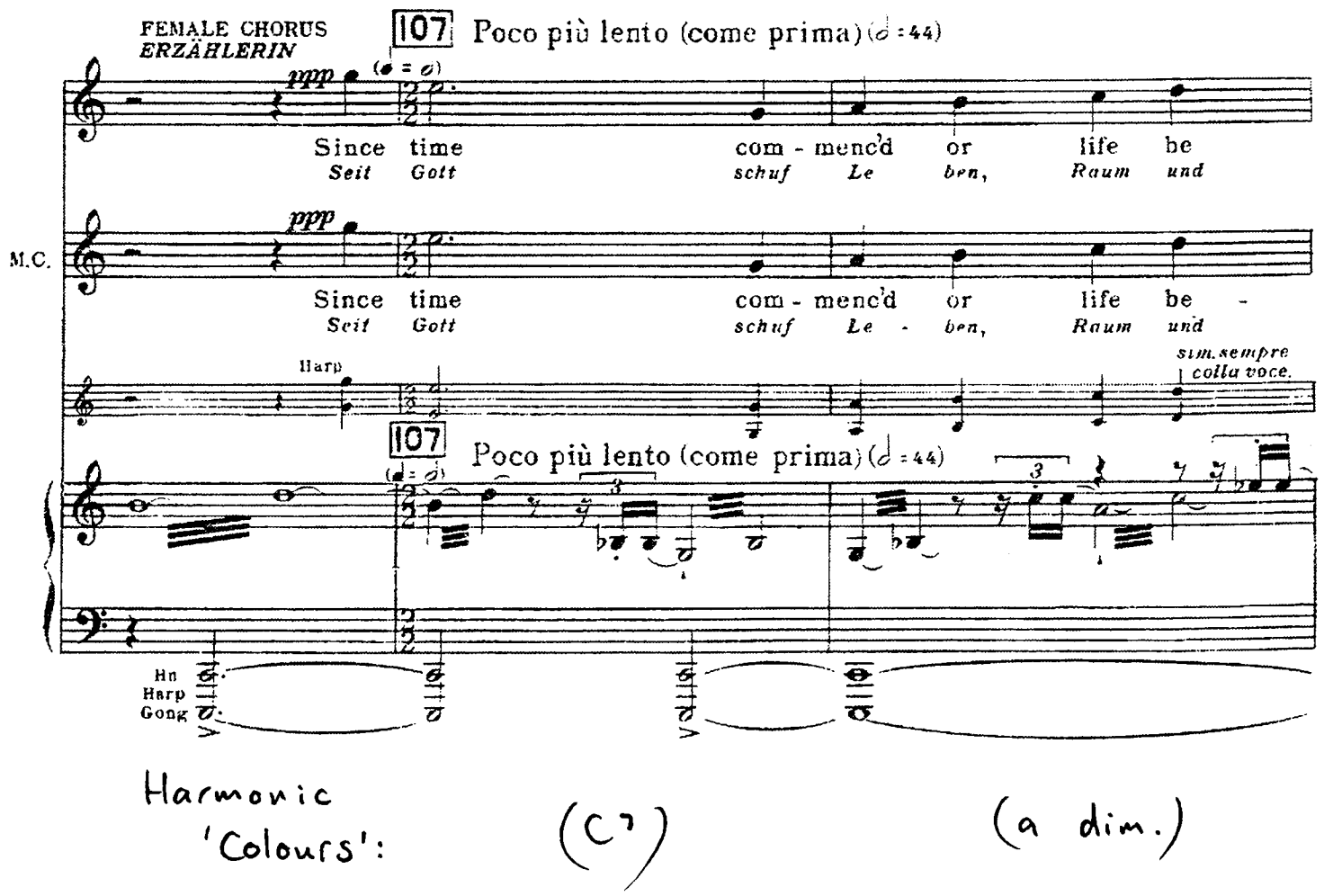
Ex. 3, v. The 'Rape Chorale' (Interlude II)

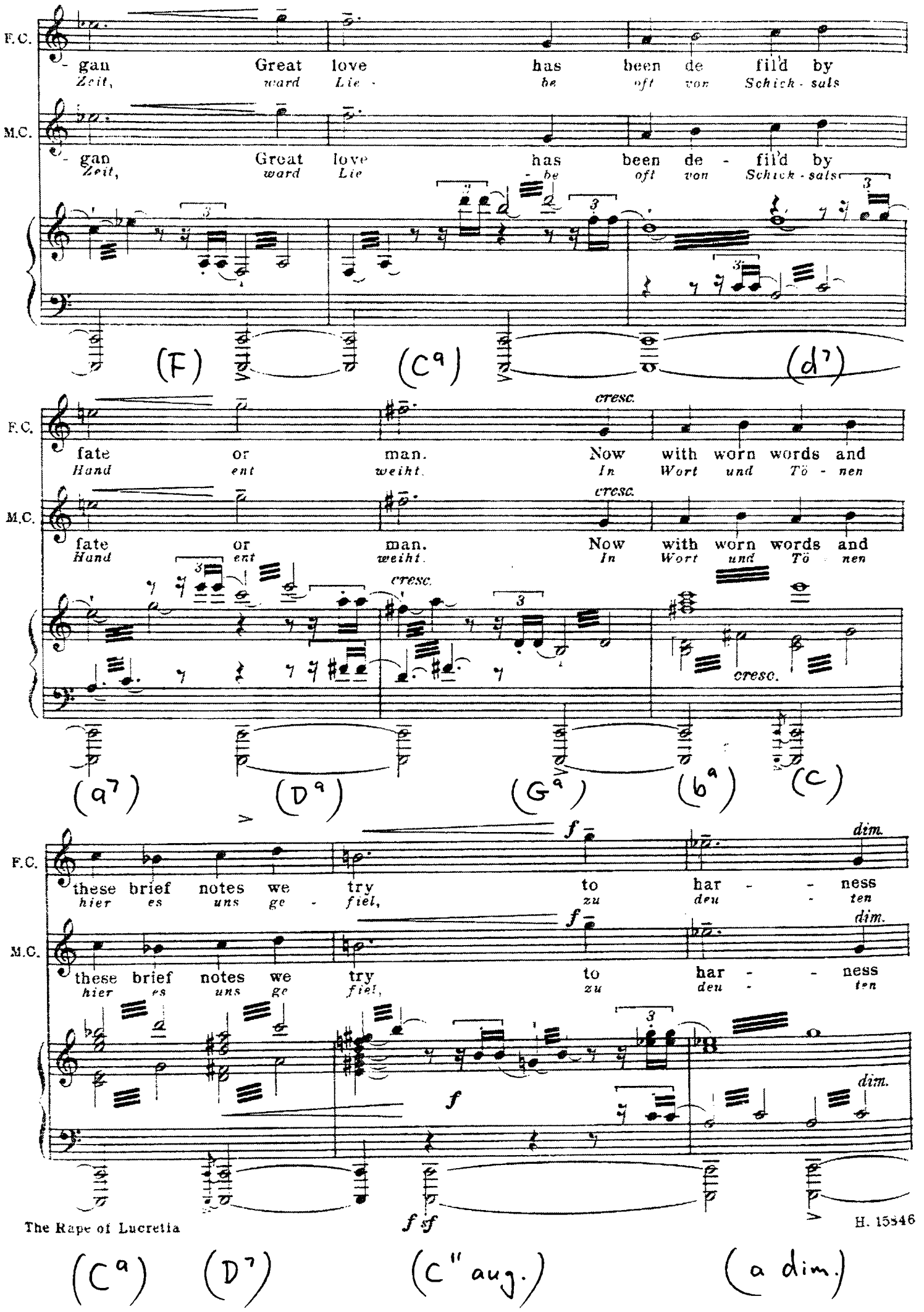


The opposition between Apollonian formality (chorale melody) and Dionysian passion (instrumental accompaniment) is here at its most pointed. The $C^{\#}$ and E^{b} hemming in D, in a Phrygian D with sharpened 7^{th} context, recalls the *Grimes* Storm Theme (Ex. 2, ix, a). The chorale tune itself is contained within the melodic range of the tritone ($C^{\#}$–G), the relevance of *Diabolus* associations being obvious in context, if disturbing in its endurance through the closing religious solutions proposed in the text (e.g. 'Nothing impure survives').

At the conclusion of the opera (II.2, Fig. 107 *et seq.*) the text and music of the 'hymn' – now in C major – undergo a transformation in which the Classical paradigm that underpins the Male and Female Chorus' dramatic role as Greek Chorus comes to the fore (i.e. their Classical role rather than their stated Christian one):

Ex. 3, vi. Final version of the hymn and conclusion of the opera




F.C.
M.C.
gan Great love has been de fil'd by
Zeit, ward Lie - be oft von Schick - sals
(F) (C9) (d7)
cresc.
fate or man. Now with worn words and
Hand ent weiht. In Wort und Tö - nen
(a7) (D9) (G9) (b9) (C)
these brief notes we try to har - - ness
hier es uns ge - fiel, zu deu - - ten
dim.
(C9) (D7) (C" aug.) (a dim.)
The Rape of Lucretia
H. 15846



A textual binarism is presented here:

–Since time commenc'd [...] Great love has been defiled by fate.
–Since [...] life began [...] Great love has been defiled by [...] man.

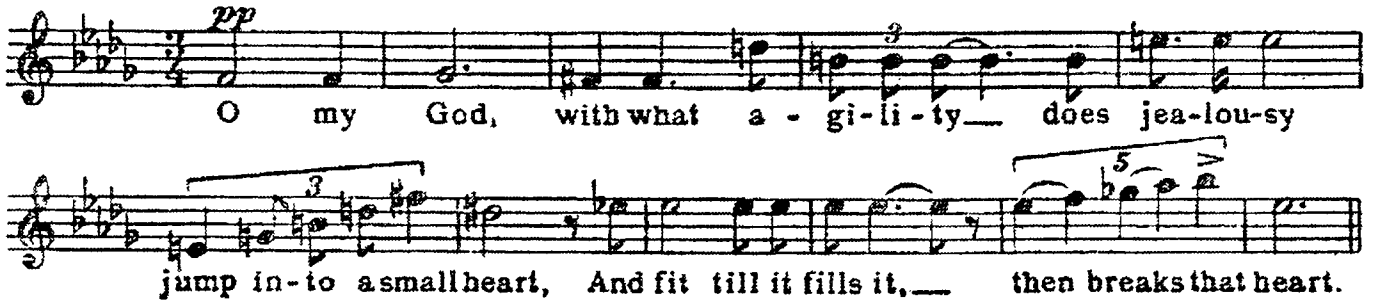
The new text and musical accompaniment breaks the sense of absolute ritual to some extent. The C pedal (i.e. now the root-position of the opening C major

form) is consistently clouded by a sequence of shifting harmonies underpinning the text. It is the minor thirds related to Motive *z* that predominate at the end of the opera, the minor third again registering with Britten as a diminishment of affirmation against the traditional major triad type (e.g. *A Boy was Born*).[10]

b. The *Lucretia* Melodic Theme

In considering ritual forms with interactions of sacred-profane elements, an investigation of the four appearances of the *Lucretia* Melodic Theme reveals the 'concealed' spiritual trajectory of the opera:

Ex. 3, vii. The Melodic Theme (first statement)



The texts of the four statements of the Melodic Theme

Act I

1. Oh, my god, with what agility does jealousy jump into a small heart,
   And fit till it fills it, then breaks that heart.
   Male Chorus at the conclusion of Junius' Aria, I.1, Fig. 25

2. Now stallion and rider
   Wake the sleep of water
   Disturbing its cool dream
   With hot flank and shoulder,
   Tarquinius knows no fear,
   He's across!

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[10] White 1970/83:154.

He's heading here!
Male Chorus, Interlude I, Fig. 54

Act II

3. See how the centaur mounts the sky,
And serves the sun with all its seed of stars.
Now the great river underneath the ground
Flows through Lucretia,
And Tarquinius is drowned.
Quartet: Lucretia/Tarquinius/Female Chorus/Male Chorus, II.1, Fig. 42

4. O my love,
Our love was too rare
For life to tolerate or fate forbear from soiling.
For me this shame, for you this sorrow.
Lucretia's Confession, II.2, Fig. 91

Intriguingly the first Theme appearance, marking the fall of man into sin, cadences from F to B^b, echoing Grimes' F–B^b 'So be it! And God have mercy upon me!' and anticipating the harmonic progression of Vere (C–) f–F–B^b in *Budd*. The four Theme texts, taken as a group, highlight a different invocation of 'rape'.[11]

The first Theme statement describes the 'rape' of the small heart by sin, specifically jealousy. However it is here that one subtly encounters the tension between the Christian view of sin and redemption (individual responsibility) and the Classical notion of victimization by a dispassionate fate (circumstance). The idea that jealousy can in some way jump into a human heart and stay there without individual assent (i.e. a state of non-repentance) is fatalistic rather than Christian: Junius is not forced to be jealous against his

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[11] The idea of international 'rape' in 1946 carried meaning from the war, e.g. 'the rape of Poland' etc.

will, he freely chooses to feed and sustain its corrupting power – indeed he celebrates it – as Tarquinius does with sexual lust.[12]

It may be thought that, in this way, it is part of Britten's strategy to rationalize all sin as fatalistically pre-ordained without the free will of the individual being involved (or, at most, with its resignation). This implication certainly applies to Junius who is motivated by political desire (the first Theme appearance), Tarquinius who is motivated by sexual desire (second and third appearance), and Lucretia, who is horrified that on some level she is motivated by illicit desire (fourth appearance). The third Theme statement implies that, in life, both perpetrators and victims of violence are 'raped' by fate. The militaristic aspect behind Tarquinius as the protagonist of this sexual violence may be considered an ironic precedent for *War Requiem* and *Wingrave*.

The Theme is therefore shown to be a further ritualistic bridge between Christian and pagan, negating the Christian doctrine of individual responsibility for sin and the demand for repentance implied by Britten's emphatic incorporation of the Christian element.[13] Such tensions behind Britten's sacred–profane juxtaposition lead to a necessary investigation of the Classical and Christian paradigms that lie at *Lucretia*'s heart.

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[12] This is buttressed by other omissions from Obey by Britten and Duncan, serving to make Tarquinius more sympathetic and Lucretia's more 'ready' submission to him more disturbing. See Howard 1969:39 and Headington (Palmer 1984:122-3).
[13] The Christian concept is summarized in James 1:13-15.

2. The Classical Problem

The Classical Problem, partly inherited from the Lucretia legend itself, is bound up with the issue of redemption according to Roman law. This is important for present purposes in that Lucretia's reaction to the systems of redemption generally accepted and practiced in the culture of her day will be helpful when drawn against the later (historically chronological) universal system of Christian redemption.

According to the Classical paradigm Collatinus is ultimately Lucretia's Judge, Jury and Executioner.[14] Were it not for the major revision of Collatinus' role in 1947 this would be insignificant: Collatinus is ultimately made by Britten to serve a similar redemptive purpose as does Ellen Orford in *Grimes*, and he forms a stratum of the judgement rhetoric in *Lucretia* that will be key to exposing the spiritual ramifications of the opera.

The two critical moments concerning Collatinus' transformation are his arioso and aria in I.1 (Figs. 26–32) and his interactions with Lucretia followed by his aria prior to her suicide in II.2 (Figs. 92–93[1]). The revision of Collatinus' Act I aria represents the single most sweeping revision of any character in the opera:

> [Britten] did not want Collatinus seen as a natural cuckold in his too ready acceptance of Junius' protestations, and so an aria with a beautiful flowing tune in triplet time disappeared, to be replaced it is true by another, but representing a different side of the composer's invention.[15]

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[14] Donaldson 1982:22 and 174, fn. 8.

[15] Harewood 1946/81:np and 1981:129. Duncan 1981:91 implies 'someone' persuaded Britten to make the revision. Jansen 2001 claims that Pears persuaded Britten to add the Epilogue.

1946

(26) *Allegretto comodo (crotchet=66)*
[arioso]

COLLATINUS (coming out of tent)
How gen'rous of you, dear Junius,
To toast Lucretia too.
I was suspicious
You were jealous
And very distress'd by Patricia's
Unfaithfulness. [...]

(29) [Aria]

Love is all desperation,
A vain attempt which lonely man
In desperation makes
To share his loneliness
Which is his wilderness.
(30) Grief is the last consolation
For this effort which ev'ry man
Without exception finds
From love's cruel faithlessness
Or death's slow wantonness.
Their love is all despair.

1947

(26) *Andante con moto*
[arioso]

COLLATINUS (coming out of tent)
How bitter of you [Junius]
How venomous to vent your rage on her!
Why be so jealous?
You were blinded by grief at
Patricia's unfaithfulness. [...]

(30) [Aria]

Those who love create fetters
which liberate.
Those who love destroy their
solitude, destroy their solitude.
Their love is only joy.
(31) Those who love defeat
Time, which is Death's deceit.
Those who love defy
Death's slow revenge.
Their love is all despair

Ex. 3, viii, a. Collatinus' aria (I.1, 1946)



Ex. 3, viii, b. Collatinus' aria (I.1, 1947)



A greater 'strength' is achieved by the new prominent use of Collatinus' distinguishing perfect fourth at Fig. 26 (Tarquinius' fourths are diminished), and by 'solid' crotchet movement, sequences, triadic underpinnings and conjunct scalic movement – connecting Collatinus to the musical manner of

Ellen Orford in *Grimes*, furthered by the A–E^{b} tritonal relations in his music[16] The instrumental figure at Figs. 33 to 34 is a development of Collatinus' motivic fourth, 'Those who love create'.[17]

In II.2 (Fig. 92 *et seq.*) the revisions are less comprehensive but no less telling in their import:

COLLATINUS
If spirit's not given there is no need of shame.
Lust is all taking, in that there's shame.
What Tarquinius has taken
Can be forgotten.
What Lucretia has given
Can be forgiven.
[Collatinus kneels to Lucretia]
[MALE AND FEMALE CHORUS*
| No, no, Collatinus.
| No, no, Collatinus.
| If you forgive
| You will double her remorse and drive her shame to grief.
| No, no, Collatinus!
| No, no, Collatinus!]
LUCRETIA
Even great love's too frail to bear the weight of shadows.
Now [She stabs herself]
I'll be forever chaste, with only death to ravish me.
See, how my wanton blood
Washes my shame away!
[She dies]

*[ ] = Original 1946 version. This segment is replaced by a (wordless!) horn in 1947 (cf. *Grimes* and *Wingrave*, II.2)

This is the point where the Classical Problem arises most forcibly. Collatinus, who could condemn Lucretia under Roman law, offers her instead an unconditional grace and forgiveness that clearly pre-echoes the kind of

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[16] There is also much incidental comment that could be made on Junius' Iago-like nature at this point.
[17] Fourths might be deemed symbolic of 'moral imperative' across Britten's *oeuvre*, e.g. Claggart (*Budd*); Babylonians (*Furnace*).

redemptive love offered by Christ in the Epilogue. Lucretia's spurning of this grace under Classical law bodes ill for the efficacy of Christian forgiveness ostensibly proposed in the opera as a solution, 'her rejection of her husband's words of comfort almost more chilling than the fact of the Rape itself.'[18] It is here that the ambivalence of the opera's motivation is either most unsatisfactory or most telling – whether it is about the workings of fate in a pagan society or about the operation of grace among redeemed Christian men and women.[19]

The libretto makes clear that Lucretia's suicide is motivated primarily by a sense of shame stemming from pride. This 'culture of shame' inflicted by a dispassionate Fate propagated by the Classical paradigm and its obsession with social image and temporal redemption (cf. Vere in *Budd*), stands in opposition to the 'culture of guilt' that is proper to the Christian paradigm. Negative guilt does not produce change, which is the Classical tragedy. But positive guilt does produce change according to the Christian paradigm: it produces desire to change, which in turn should produce confession, repentance and, thus, a clear conscience.[20]

Lucretia is a reconfiguration of the Britten theme of *Fathers* through *Grimes*: one uncovers a 'Pride' elicited from Lucretia that is 'hostile to' the 'Charity' of grace offered by both Collatinus (within the Classical paradigm)

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[18] Whittall (Cooke 1999:111). On the interiorization of 'judgement' see Ricoeur 1974:429.
[19] Howard 1969:43.
[20] 'Repentance' is a translation from the Greek: *metanoia* (lit: 'change of direction') meaning a combination of mental assent (i.e. admission of guilt) and consequent change of action (i.e. not merely mental assent, e.g. Acts 26:20).

and the notion of Christian grace offered by the Male and Female Chorus. Lucretia's rejection of grace is the issue here. This is a refusal to repent according to the Christian logic the opera proposes.

Aside from these particular concerns, the problem of Lucretia's redemption according to the Classical paradigm is compounded by the Classical view of suicide:

> Beyond these souls [in Hades], in the next places, dwell the sorrowful who, though without guilt, gained death for themselves by their own hand, flinging their own lives away in the loathing of the light. [This specifically includes Lucretia, Dido and Phaedra.] How willingly they would now exchange all the poverty, and every harsh tribulation, in the bright air above. But Divine Law bars their way back.[21]

Virgil's list is particularly striking as Britten was to realize Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* in 1951, and set edited passages of Robert Lowell's translation of Racine's *Phaedra* in 1975. In *Phaedra*, as in *Wingrave* and *Venice*, Britten does not offer any kind of redemptive possibility in Christian terms. This situation, combined with the failure of the Classical paradigm to redeem Lucretia, points to an evaluation of the Christian Problem.

3. The Christian Problem

From *Lucretia*'s inception the Christian aspect created critical problems.[22] Initially the blame for this was laid at Duncan's door. But later Duncan admitted that the amplification of the Christian element throughout the opera

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[21] Virgil 1956:160.
[22] Duncan 1981:164–70 cites a cross section of the earliest reviews.

had been proposed and insisted upon by Britten himself.[23] An early commentator justified this:

> [Britten] would never have set a cruel subject to music without linking this cruelty to the hope of redemption.[24]

However in *Grimes* Britten had set a cruel subject to music, redemption in Christian terms being clearly rejected by Peter. Any claim for Peter's redemption would have to be made on aesthetic or naturalistic grounds (cf. *Serenade*, *Spring Symphony*, the *Dream*, etc.), not in terms that are in any orthodox sense Christian.[25]

In the *Donne* cycle (1945) there is a theological inconsistency: although the struggle in prayer for repentance is the central theme of sonnets 1-8 there is never any evidence in the cycle that such repentance is achieved. Thus the 'death of death' adumbrated in the ninth and concluding sonnet, although a concrete theological truth, is not efficaciously linked with the unresolved struggles in the texts of the preceding eight settings in a way that is clear and logical: it is not 'beyond reasonable doubt' that the professed desire for repentance in the first eight sonnets, which would make the hope for the 'death of Death' in the ninth sonnet a reality, has actually been achieved.

If the terminology is allowed, Britten may have considered it his musical mission to provide the religious 'efficacy' that is missing in the poetry

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[23] *Ibid.*:68–69; 75–77; 85; 168.
[24] Holst 1966:40.
[25] Keller 1973:236–37. Britten's (ironic) comment '[Grimes] was more than just an ordinary fisherman who got across his own little bit of society, but he got across, not only because he – well, had a bad temper and behaved badly, but also because he had ideas that they couldn't follow' suggests an obscure kind of secular-redemptive view (BBC, 1960).

of the *Donne* cycle (i.e. musical logic supplants theologic). The emergence of B major in the conclusion of the final sonnet theoretically 'resolves' the tension between B and C and their relative keys that has formed the argument of the previous eight. This interaction is significant because, in the Epilogue of *Lucretia*, the theme of redemption in Jesus Christ (Figs. 105–6, 'He is all!') is adumbrated by the Male Chorus in B major turning to C major for the final 'hymn' (Fig. 107 *et seq.*). As in the *Donne* cycle, this 'resolution', while logical from a musical point of view, may simultaneously represent a profound ambiguity from a Christian perspective: the 'missing link' of repentance. The fact that Britten had completed but discarded a tenth sonnet setting, Epilogue: 'Perchance he for whom the bell tolls be so ill', magnifies this impression.[26]

The similarity between the motives Britten gives to Tarquinius and Lucretia (Exs. 3, i, a–b) is disturbing. A precedent and consequent in Britten's *oeuvre* for the interlocking thirds of Lucretia's Motive have been noted in Britten criticism.[27] However, a closer inspection of Britten's use of such contexts is revealing:

Ex. 3, ix, a. *Rejoice in the Lamb* (1943, Fig. 20)



The precedent here, in Britten's setting of edited extracts from Christopher Smart's 'mad' poem *Jubilate Agno*, is that of a subject who identifies himself

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[26] Carpenter 1992:228.
[27] Headington (Palmer 1984:121). White 1970/83:154 cites the interlocking thirds of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* as precedent.

with Christ and is suffering persecution from his oppressors. The connection of such a moment with the Christian implications of Lucretia's dilemma is straightforward enough, and demonstrates a spiritual consistency in Britten's use of the interlocking third. The consequent is Miles' Malo Song from the *Screw*:

Ex. 3, ix, b. Malo Song (*Screw*, I.VI, Fig. 51)



This connection is particularly striking, not least in Britten's use of the cor anglais, discerned to 'represent Miles' acceptance of a propensity to evil.'[28] The Malo Song and its later manifestations in the *Screw* make clear that Miles has already been corrupted by sin and is consciously aware of that corruption. The cor anglais is the instrumental colour Britten reserves to

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[28] Evans 1979/96:219. Britten also used the solo cor anglais for his death and funeral incidental music for *Timon of Athens* (1937, see J. Evans *et al.* 1987:114).

accompany Lucretia as she slowly walks towards Collatinus to make her confession after the rape (II.2, Fig. 81).[29]

The interlocking minor thirds of the Tarquinius and Lucretia Motives bring them into a curiously close relationship before the rape.[30] Indeed the octatonic possibilities of the Tarquinius Motive yield a far greater number of Motive *z* forms throughout the opera than the 'open' minor thirds of the Lucretia Motive.[31] This presence of Motive *z* recalls its significance as a symbol of permanently fallen man.

Motive *z* and its related minor third profile suggests a reinterpretation in *Lucretia* of the 'Pride so hostile to our Charity' theme in Britten's previous work as 'Shame so hostile to our Charity'.[32] Feelings of shame ignite a pride that leads to acts of (self-) retaliation. Such a constitution cannot be equated with the teaching of Christ to 'Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you' (Matt. 5:44, later set by Britten in *Voices for Today*). This is especially true, as Lucretia herself demonstrates, when the 'enemy' and 'those who hate you' is oneself (i.e. an internally divided nature turned in on itself).

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[29] In *Lucretia* Tarquinius symbolically snuffs out the candle with his sword as the curtain comes down (Interlude II) and in the *Screw* Miles symbolically blows out the candle in the bedroom scene with the Governess (II.4) to music that directly recalls Lucretia's sleep music (II.1, Fig. 13), in both cases scored for alto flute in G, bass clarinet in B^{b} and harp (with the addition of Miles' 'Malo' cor anglais in the frame of II.4).

[30] Headington (Palmer 1984:122-3).

[31] Evans 1979/96:135.

[32] '[Britten] is inhibited by gentility and shame. For clearly Innocence is far from innocent, and his work is at its greatest and its most typical is impelled by a clutch of dark material' (Holloway 1992:6).

In *Grimes* this 'internally self-divided' nature resides in the Borough as well as Peter.[33] In *Lucretia* such division resides outwardly in Junius, who is divided against everyone, and inwardly in Lucretia. Junius, like Tarquinius, is obsessed with the Lucretia Motive, implying that she is as much raped by Junius' political ambition as by Tarquinius' lust, a point amply demonstrated in Junius' political opportunism after Lucretia's suicide.

Through these motivic observations, in tandem with musical analysis of *Lucretia* elsewhere demonstrating Lucretia's deeply ambiguous private attitude towards the rape, it can be suggested that the Tarquinius–Lucretia connection indicates Britten's close musical investigation of the universal subject of unregenerate Original Sin.[34] This strengthens the implications of Britten's previous treatment of the major–minor third in relation to Motive *z* in his music before *Lucretia*. However, there is one very important distinction to be made in Britten's use of such symbolism that has profound ramifications for his art: while Motive *z* is connected to the concept of shame as opposed to guilt, it also rationalises the use of shame to circumvent the burden of guilt.[35] This emphasis on shame is closer to the Classical paradigm than the Christian and may be considered a technique connected to the 'guilty innocence' discerned in Britten:[36]

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[33] Headington (Palmer 1984:122) connects the Lucretia Motive with Grimes' 'Until the Borough hate poisons your mind' (Love Duet, Ex. 2, ii).
[34] Evans 1979/96:139–43.
[35] 'Lucretia kills herself not out of a sense of guilt but out of a sense of shame' (Donaldson 1982:34).
[36] Donaldson 1982:21-39. Judas Iscariot's suicide could be viewed in the same terms.

> Once again we get a two-dimensional situation: innocence on the surface level, guilt lower down. You find, for instance, that in *Lucretia*, the heroine, though on the surface absolutely innocent, must nevertheless have provided sufficient unconscious stimulation for the rape to take place.[37]

The key to Lucretia's idolatry, from a Christian perspective, may be found in the line of recitative for the Male Chorus that opens the work: 'The Romans, being wanton, worship chastity'. Lucretia's proud perfectionism grounded in the immaculate preservation of her virtue, the very coinage of her social and political distinction, masks the reality that she, like us, is a sinner in need of confession and repentance. This would matter little were it not for Britten's inclusion of the Christian component in the opera. In this connection Lucretia's universality is limited to a representation of fallen man who chooses to remain in a fallen state until death: she is not humble enough to accept and submit to systems of redemption outside her own perfectionism (i.e. she remains 'under law' according to the Christian view) or, at the other extreme, passive resignation to sin, suggested by Britten's music[38] Comprehension of this aspect of Lucretia's nature is crucial to the revelation of this same dilemma when it faces Aschenbach in *Venice* (reconfigured as Apollonian perfectionism versus Dionysian passion).

The theme of 'Glory' is a further connection between Grimes and Lucretia, made explicit later in *War Requiem* and *Wingrave* and Britten's

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[37] Keller 1973:235.
[38] Ricoeur 1974:430.

general treatment of war and violence. In *Lucretia* it forms a further bond between Lucretia and Junius Brutus that is both historical and alarming:

> 'Glory' is the problem here [for Junius Brutus], as it was for those who sifted the motives of Lucretia. The process of questioning in each case is strikingly similar. Over the centuries (the reasoning seems to run), both Lucretia and Brutus have been glorified for their actions; thus it must be suspected that a lust for worldly glory was the 'real' motive for those actions. A Christian does good in private, careless of popular judgement, knowing that God can perceive the secrets of the heart. Pagan heroes do their fine deeds in public, thirsting for glory, wanting to be seen to be great in their own time and in times to come. To judge them aright, we must look into their hearts (as God looks into ours), searching for ultimate motives; and this the Christian interpreter confidently and inventively does, untroubled by intervening aeons of time and even by the question of the historical authenticity of those whose spiritual characters he dissects.[39]

Lucretia's focus on worldly vainglory disqualifies her from Christian redemption. The deliberate timelessness Britten introduces thorough the 'hymn' accentuates and welcomes this approach to interpreting *Lucretia*: the redemptive gap between Classical tragedy and the Christian claims of redemption in the texts of the Male and Female Chorus (the source of so many critical attacks on the work) will be bridged not by Christian doctrine, but by Britten's music. This timeless aspect to *Lucretia* will prove critical also in the spiritual assessment of Vere in *Budd*.

Additionally, there is revealed in *Lucretia* a personal disaster that will be reprised in *Venice*, but without any sense of Christian redemption. This disaster is not that Lucretia does not love Collatinus or that their love for each other is not enough. The disaster is the failure to keep at bay the Dionysian

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[39] Donaldson 1982:125–26.

eruption of passion against Apollonian moral restraint, emanating from the 'secret lust' referred to by Junius (I.1, Fig. 34). This is achieved through a Classical paradigm that is passive–aggressive in relation to the Christian element. Consequently Lucretia, like Aschenbach later, realizes with horror that in the right (or wrong) set of circumstances she is capable of anything. The fact that the legend of Lucretia is unalterably profane from a Christian perspective (as a complement to the Classical condemnation of Lucretia cited above) is demonstrated in Augustine's summation:

> If [Lucretia's] homicide is extenuated [i.e. her 'self-murder' through suicide], her adultery is established;
> If she is cleared of adultery, the murder is abundantly proved. [...]
> If she is adulterous, why is she praised?
> If chaste, why was she put to death?[40]

Augustine makes a clear distinction between the act of rape (i.e. the forcing of another to take one's sin) and adultery (i.e. on some level a participation in the sin).

Britten's juxtaposition of sacred and profane in *Lucretia*, bridging them by a musical grace, introduces a seminal aspect of Britten's art. It also points to motivations behind Britten's consistent re-engagement with texts and themes related to Christianity within both his dramatic and concert music. This engagement is explicitly predicted in the Male and Female Chorus of *Lucretia*:

> The Male Chorus comments on the activities of the men, the Female on those of the women. Their reactions and interpretations, based on Christian moral ideas, for they are A.D. and the story is 500 B.C., are

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[40] Augustine 1984:192. See Donaldson 1982:21–39.

> separate from, but interact with, the story. The dramatic form of the whole ['which most critics fail to perceive and, consequently, are misdirected'] is thus determined by the struggle between the ideal and the actual in the minds of the Chorus, who are not presented as superior beings, and therefore for whom the ideals are not (except in Christ) existential, but only aspirations and the grounds of their valuations. As in one of their functions, the Choruses represent the audience, they are used for controlling our private interpretations of the story. This use of the Chorus and of religious compensatory ideas at once reminds one of Greek tragedy. But the real ancestor of this opera is the morality play of the Middle Ages, strange and unfamiliar as such art form may be at the present time.[41]

This observation of Britten's use of the Chorus not only as Greek arbitrator between action and audience but also as Puccinian manipulator of how the audience should interpret the action is important to the comprehension of Britten's dramaturgical purpose and intent. (Additionally, the identification of the Medieval morality play as a prototype is a signal prophecy of Britten's Canticle II: *Abraham and Isaac*, *Noye* and the Church Parable trilogy, extending to the final unfinished Nativity Chester Play sequence in 1976.)

What is particularly striking is the distinction made between the use of Christianity as 'only aspirations and the grounds of their valuations' on the one hand, and 'for whom the ideals are not (except in Christ) existential' on the other. This distinction between 'ideal' and 'actual' has a philosophical overtone for Britten himself: in his Tribunal Statement of 1942 (Chapter One) Britten made a distinction between the 'ideal' and the 'actual':

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[41] Boys 1946: 9–10. Boys was a close friend of Britten's, especially during the years before and including *Lucretia*, giving his comments special authority.

> *['Ideal']*
> [...] I think [Christ's] teaching is sound and his example should be followed. [...] I don't seek as suggested to pick & choose from his teaching, but I regard the whole context of his teaching & example as the standard by which I must judge.
>
> *['Actual']*
> I have not attended [Church] for the last five years. I do not believe in the Divinity of Christ. [...] [The Tribunal tried] to tie me down too narrowly to a belief in the divinity of Christ.[42]

That the Male Chorus announces a kind of 'grace' antithetical to orthodox belief (or, what Britten called 'church doctrine') may be seen to match those of Britten's personal beliefs.[43]

Epilogue

Although the Epilogue to *Lucretia* received a good deal of criticism for its Christian element, Britten's request for it was made in relation to the Christian material present in the work from its opening moments.[44]

The passacaglia that precedes the Epilogue, which juxtaposes the Classical fatalistic conjunction 'Is this it all?'/'It is all!', is essentially in the $c^{\#}$ minor that has been identified as Britten's 'symbol of sin' key (Ex. 3, iv).[45] Even the womens' E major, stemming from Britten's use of that key for the women (I.2, Figs. 74–77) and, curiously, for the music of Tarquinius as he approaches the sleeping Lucretia (II.1, Figs. 22–24, 25–27) are bound by

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[42] Mitchell–Reed 1991:1046 with fn. 1; 1058.
[43] Blyth 1981:172.
[44] Duncan 1968:134–35 and 1981:75–77.
[45] Evans 1979/96:138, cf. also *Bunyan*, 'The Blues: Quartet of the Defeated' (I.1, 9) and *Grimes*, I.ii (Fig. 67), the nieces duet in 'The Boar'.

$c^{\#}$ minor colouring.[46] Such symbolism, along with the presence of Lucretia's 'virtuous' C major in Tarquinius' libidinous music in Interlude I, is an indication that keys Britten associates with realms of relative innocence in one situation are tainted in another, what Keller called 'Britten's own C major'.[47] Such symbolism may be seen as a factor in Britten's transformation of 'guilt' into 'innocence' by musically bypassing the Christian doctrine of repentance.

The $c^{\#}$ minor of the passacaglia, however, has an important musical function:

> This prepares for the Epilogue, for his answer to the question, now more intimately asked by the Female Chorus – 'Is this it all?' is given in terms of his Christian belief. Each instrument now is entirely dominated by the rhythm, which takes on the ambiguity 'Is this it all?' 'It is all,' 'He is all,' and the music dies away to infinity.[48]

This identification of the merging of meaning in the purely instrumental motivic minor and major third against the concluding C major by one of the opera's earliest commentators (and close friend) of Britten's is important: despite the B major Christian affirmations of the Male Chorus, the closing C major is left ambiguous, for it is not Lucretia's (Christian) innocence that has been restored, but her (Classical) virtue.[49]

Britten may be seen to be attempting a musical synthesis in the closing C major between the impossible divide of Christ (B major, cf. the final *Donne* sonnet) and $c^{\#}$ (sin, cf. most of Act II). This is effected as the instrumental

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[46] *Ibid.*
[47] Mitchell–Keller 1952:117.
[48] Boys 1946:15.
[49] Evans 1979/96:140–41.

coda of the opera moves in white-note tremolos (i.e. still 'in C') to a close on a minor chord of the ninth, in which the C pedal becomes the third (Ex. 3. vi, the A is in the second violin tremolando). In addition the continuation of the brief ostinato, originally attached to the question 'It is all?' transformed in the Epilogue to '[Christ] is all', presses on through to the end of the work, consistently avoiding an unqualified C major (with brief but ineffectual exceptions).

The compromised nature of this concluding C major may profitably be compared with the unequivocal clarity of the final C major of the *Spring Symphony* (1949) where 'redemptive' symbolism is achieved through images of nature rather than religion.[50] By contrast the weak C major at Fig. 108 in *Lucretia* (i.e. the end of the hymn) is not convincingly clarified and sustained. This and the constantly shifting major–minor ambiguities of the rhythmic ostinato ('It is all!' v. '[Christ] is all!') consistently thwart any clear-cut sense of affirmation required by Britten's proposed 'Christian solution'. Retrospectively such religious ambiguity is clearly prophetic of the Church Parables and late operas.

Summary

The musical 'resolution' of *Lucretia* – if such it be – leaves an unresolved tension between textual logic (from a theological/doctrinal perspective) and musical logic in Britten's art: a kind of aesthetic musical equivalence of

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[50] Indeed, the symbolism of the cyclical nature of the seasons in the *Spring Symphony* can be related to the implied cyclical nature of Vere's memory in *Budd* (Chap. 4, see also Keller 1973).

Christian 'grace' in which sin which has not been repented of and, therefore, unregenerate guilt can be admitted as redeemable. This is, precisely, the musical argument of *Lucretia*: Lucretia's rejection of the love and grace demonstrated by Collatinus, reflecting Grimes' similar rejection of Ellen, thwarts both the Classical and Christian redemptive modes offered within the drama itself, consequently throwing any redemptive focus entirely onto the musical element.

Britten's development of an aesthetic grace which enabled him to be a 'Christian in my music', while bypassing Biblical (or, what he called 'Church') doctrine, may be viewed as a musical and moral quest in his art, possibly reflecting and transforming the preaching–sermonizing he absorbed as a boy. His attempt to achieve this in *Grimes* and *Lucretia* against the suicides of his protagonists (to which sexual guilt may be appended) suggest redemptive claims for music in terms aligned with the 'Christian' that go beyond (or fall short of) the Biblical.[51]

This aesthetic theory clarifies the dichotomy between the complexity of the Christian claims against the Classical background of the *Lucretia* libretto and the musical logic of the score. It is here that many previous critics of the opera have failed to recognize Britten's private purpose in amplifying the Christian element: according to Biblical doctrine it is impossible to make any convincing case that puts Lucretia's redemption beyond reasonable doubt – even less so in the case of Peter Grimes. In light of this, Britten is offering an

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[51] Cf. Canticle III.

alternate type of musical grace, which inevitably serves as a passive–aggressive resistance to Christian modes of redemption. This resistance emerges, full force, in *War Requiem*.

In the operatic trilogy of the early 1950s (*Budd*, *Gloriana* and the *Screw*) to which we now turn, Britten subjects this musical redemption to different kinds of examination by dramas linked by similar themes.

Chapter 4: *Billy Budd*: 'temporary salvation' and the Faustian pact

'In fact, the Christian content of Melville's Budd is potential rather than actual: for the opera, the librettists, so to speak, have realized it.'[1]

'[By throwing Original Sin into Budd, Melville] gave us harmony and temporary salvation.'[2]

A number of perfectly legitimate readings of *Billy Budd* exist in the Britten literature, viewing the opera as a more or less traditional narrative with an attendant multiplicity of ambiguities. The author does not deny these claims or the legitimacy of the legacy of productions supporting such readings. The present chapter, anticipating that of *The Turn of the Screw*, is undertaken in the spirit of recent Britten criticism:

> In many essential respects – and I have in mind Britten's art, not his personality – 'ambiguity' was foreign to everything that, *technically*, he stood for. [...] We must look [...] to the most authoritative interpretive source of all, the music itself.[3]

One of the *Budd* librettists, E. M. Forster stated, 'I tend to think Billy the central figure. He names the opera, and I think I consider things from his point of view' (Eric Crozier was co-librettist). Britten's trajectory was different:

> Billy always attracted me, of course – the radiant, young figure. I felt there was going to be quite an opportunity for writing nice dark music for Claggart; but I think I must admit that it is Vere, who has what

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[1] Mitchell 1995:379–80. References are to the two-act revised version (1960).
[2] Forster 1927/90:130.
[3] Mitchell 1994:8–9.

> seems to me the main moral problem of the whole work, round whom the drama was going to centre.[4]

Such divergence between composer and librettists was prefigured in both *Grimes* and *Lucretia*.[5]

Britten's grounding *Budd* around Vere's 'main moral problem' is one of the interpretive keys to the opera's meaning:

> What I think Ben had in mind, and I certainly had in mine when I directed it, was Vere's telling of an episode in his life as he could recall it. In this uncomplicated way we could [engage an] audience unfamiliar with the story. I don't think anytime 'history' entered into Ben's working.[6]

(English National Opera presented this approach, where the older Vere of the Prologue and Epilogue walks silently across the stage observing various events.)

While not wishing to impose this as the only possible interpretation of the opera, the reading of *Budd* as a projection of Vere's memory to the

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[4] Britten (*BBC*) 1960. Britten's distinction between Claggart and Vere can be taken to apply at the narrative level, not necessarily the psychological/spiritual.

[5] Holloway 1992:6 and Rupprecht 2001:97 discuss this divergence.

[6] Basil Coleman, private correspondence (2 Feb. 2002). Also Piper: 'We must never lose sight of the fact that the whole thing is taking place in Vere's mind, and is being recalled by him' Coleman: 'And to help establish this we must get him as close as possible to the audience for both Prologue and Epilogue. Britten has particularly stressed this to me. It must be intimate, a confession almost' (Coleman–Piper 1951:21, the original *Budd* producer and designer). Coleman further confirmed that for the first performance of the revised two-act version in 1964 Britten had asked him to make the production 'even less naturalistic'. Coleman stated that 'Ben conceived of opera as something much deeper than the story or narrative itself'. However, as Piper's designs were more or less fixed at that stage, Coleman confirmed that they were 'unable to make the production as abstract as Ben had wished'. When asked whether Britten's intentions might have been to drive the narrative further into the field of Vere's imagination, Coleman replied that such an interpretation was 'perfectly plausible'. After the first piano play-through, with Britten at the piano singing all roles except Pears who sang Vere, Britten was 'wrung-out' by the experience and 'it was perfectly clear to me that it was more than just physically playing through the work that had wrung him out in this way' (Interview, Ewing, NJ, 7 Dec. 2002). In his celebrated film version of the opera, Coleman used dissolve techniques to merge the Prologue and Epilogue with Vere's memory of the past events.

audience is useful as a means of explicating what has been considered by other scholars to be Vere's 'convergence' with the characters he is recalling in the narrative.[7] Such convergences are amply demonstrated in both libretto and music, as will be shown, enabling a clearer view of the 'Christian' concerns of *Budd* against the earlier operas. In short, as well as recalling events as they may have happened (in terms of the opera), on another level these same events are filtered through Vere's memory and Britten's music, as a mirror of his own psychological and spiritual responses to his 'moral problem'.[8] In this respect *Budd* may be considered an opera in which Britten 'composes out' Vere's soul. This clearly anticipates the 'interior monologue' of *Venice,* Vere being a precedent of Aschenbach (both roles created by Pears).

Keller's insights into Britten's artistic personality are particularly useful here: the possible reading of the kinds of musical convergences identified in the chapters on *Grimes* and *Lucretia* may be 'symphonically' extended in *Budd* to further clarify the operations of 'guilty innocence'. Mitchell makes allusions in a similar direction: 'In the extreme case of Vere, it is not *his* 'Other Self' that we should seek but the composer's.'[9] This explains Britten's clear requirement for greater clarification of the Christian component than Melville permitted. The musical crux is the 'Interview Chords' that form

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[7] Mitchell (Cooke–Reed 1993:122–34) and 1994:12; Rupprecht 2001:96–98.

[8] 'Britten uses the human voice as an instrument that detaches itself from the orchestra to tell or enact the drama but depends for its full dramatic, as well as musical effect, on its relation to the whole fabric of sound, and of echoes and memories of sound', Piper (Gishford 1964:78–79).

[9] Mitchell (Cooke–Reed 1993:132).

a kind of interlude at the end of II.2, and Billy's and Vere's subsequent responses.

1. The Vere and Claggart convergence: unrepentant evil repressed

One of the important convergences in *Budd* is that of Vere and Claggart.[10] They are given text and music that are virtually identical. Melville implies that both men are able to intellectually comprehend the 'moral phenomenon' presented by Billy, and that this view is united by the sin of Envy.[11] That Vere's execution of Billy fulfils Claggart's envious desire requires a closer investigation of the specific spiritual tensions in their operatic manifestation. In key arias Vere and Claggart are given transformed fragments of Scripture. In Claggart's case this appears as a mis-quotation or parody of the Gospel of John (1:5):

> CLAGGART
> But alas, alas!
> The light shines in the darkness,
> and the darkness comprehends it and suffers.
> I.3, Fig. 106

Vere's example occurs in his Epilogue (cf. Philippians 4:7 and Ephesians 3:19):

> VERE
> But [Billy] has saved me and blessed me,
> and the love that passes understanding has come to me.
> Fig. [5]143

These two arias are the centrepieces in a number of textual and musical connections between Vere and Claggart, most notably in the shared

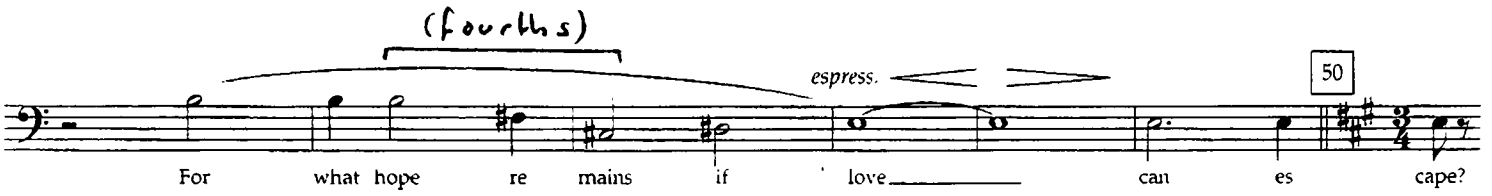
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[10] *Ibid.*

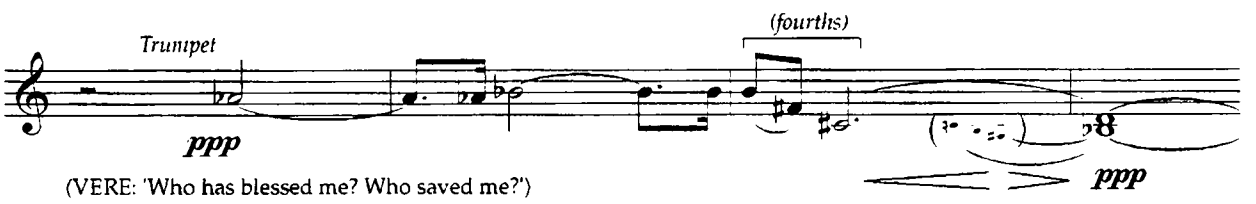
[11] 'Not only does everybody disown [Envy], but the better sort are inclined to incredulity when it is in earnest imputed to an intelligent man' (Melville 1967:355, Ch. 12).

references to 'O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness!' (cf. Billy) 'this fragment of earth' (cf. the *Indomitable*) and 'I, John Claggart, Master-at-Arms upon the *Indomitable*' / 'I, Edward Fairfax Vere, Captain of the *Indomitable*'. Most importantly for present purposes is the motivic presence of falling fourths that characterize much of Claggart's music and play an important role, at the same actual pitch, in Vere's Prologue and Epilogue:

Ex. 4, i, a. Claggart's Aria ('O beauty, o handsomeness', I.2, Fig. [6]110)



Ex. 4, i, b. Prologue (Fig. [5]4)



Ex. 4, i, c. Epilogue (Fig. 144)



It has been argued that the presence of Claggart's falling fourths in the climax of the Epilogue contribute, along with other factors, to the impression that

Vere's 'salvation' is false.[12] It may be argued that Vere's salvation is simultaneously true (secular = temporally and temporarily) and false (Christian = eternally). This distinction is made against Britten's newly 'Christianised' Billy. It is temporally 'true' in that Billy's self-sacrifice ensures the worldly preservation of Vere's rank, power, dignity and social standing, i.e. Melville's 'phenomenal pride ['that excludes vices and small sins']'.[13] This conforms to Forster's identification of 'temporary salvation' cited at the head of this chapter from a book Britten claimed to have inspired him in conceiving the opera.[14]

Vere's need for Claggart as a component in his hold on authority and power on board ship is an implication of their textual and musical convergence in these respects:

> Vere, for all his breeding and education, is inevitably forced into practices which are dishonourable [via Claggart]. Yet in the opera Vere is not simply a good man driven by the realities of war to compromise with the forces of evil. He is a man who positively welcomes the realities of war as a means of either repressing or resolving the weaknesses and contradictions of his own personality. War has made Vere a ruthless man, and the action of the opera makes clear that the ruthlessness is as real as the war.[15]

Vere's maintenance of Claggart's 'order established in hell' under the umbrella of his own authority implicates him in that order to a degree. The presence of Vere's fourths in Claggart's Iago-like aria (I.3, Fig. 105 *et seq.*) in

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[12] Whittall 1990:169–71.
[13] Melville 1967:353, Ch. 11, this passage about Claggart could as much apply to Vere.
[14] Britten (*BBC*) 1960.
[15] Whittall 1982/90:127. Melville 1967: 334–36, Ch. 4, compares Vere unfavourably with Nelson.

which he vows to destroy Billy because he morally threatens Claggart's world implies such connections.

A further musical technique underpinning this convergence, representing a considerable tightening of Britten's formal operatic technique, is how the cycle of fifths related to Vere's and Claggart's music is semitonally differentiated from the cycle bound up with Billy:[16]

Table 5: The opposing cycle of fifths between Vere and Billy

Vere and Claggart	
g/G	[the moral 'mist': II.1 cf. the 'Shanties'; I.3, Figs. 81–94][17]
c/C	[Vere: I.1, Fig. 58; I.2, Fig. 68; II.2, Fig. 73 *et seq.*] –
f/F	[Claggart: I.1, Figs. 36, [1]42; I.3, Fig. [7]111/Vere: II.2, Fig. 102] –
B^b	[Vere's 'salvation/authority' (Epilogue)]
Billy	
b/B	['?Mutiny': I.1 to Fig. 31; II.2, Fig. 70 *et seq.*]–
e/E	['King of the birds', I.1, Figs. 31-33, and execution, II.4, Figs. 123-38]–
A	[Darbies aria cadences, II.3, Figs. 115-17].

Such overlapping reference to 'key' areas is indicative of a rich network of associations within the psycho-dramaturgical field the opera traverses. Here 'mutiny' is not only militarily subversive, but can also symbolize any threat to

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[16] The tonal symbolism of both *Lucretia* and *Budd* has been authoritatively introduced in Evans 1979/96: 124–43 and Cooke–Reed 1993:89 respectively.
[17] Rupprecht 2001:94 discusses the fusion of Claggart with the 'quasi-metaphysical entity' of the Mist.

the constitutional *status quo*: Billy, as 'light', threatens 'mutiny' to the 'darkness' of Claggart's 'order established in hell'.[18] There are echoes of *Grimes* here in the threat Ellen constitutes as 'light' to Peter's 'darkness' with pessimistic implications for the Borough also, a point extending to Collatinus ('light') and Lucretia. Through the cycle of fifths, Vere's semitonal B^{b}–b 'dilemma' in the Prologue and Epilogue, predictive of the dilemmas in the respective *Gloriana* and *Screw dénouements*, reflect Britten's attribution of his 'main moral problem'.

At the heart of the A–E^{b} tritonal relationship of Claggart's aria (I.3, Figs. 105, 109 and 110) – another configuration of semitonal tension through the fifth cycle – the E^{b} suggests his hidden 'devilish' qualities opposed to Billy's defining A–E areas (cf. the 'evil' Borough's E^{b} opposition to Ellen's A (/D) opening *Grimes* II.1). A is further connected with Vere's prayers, respectively opening I.2 (Fig. $^{7}63$) and closing II.1 (Fig. $^{7}50$, leading into an orchestral 'prayer fantasy', Figs. 50–II.2, combining phrases from Vere's prayer with the 'spiritual confusion' of the earlier mist music). That the A–E^{b} of Claggart's destructive desire and A of Vere's prayers for 'light' are ultimately answered in the blazing B^{b} 'salvation-through-Billy' triad of Vere's Epilogue indicates Vere's ominous self-deception given Billy's A 'Christian salvation' cadences (II.3, Darbies Aria, see below).

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[18] Cf. a similar Grimes–Borough convergence against Ellen, the E–f tension between Ellen and Peter mirrored in the chronological E–f of Billy's 'King of the Birds' aria Claggart's following music (I.1, Fig. 31 *et seq.*).

Given this difference in quality between Vere's and Claggart's A from that of Billy's, it is significant that Vere's prayers incorporate modified versions of the Starry Vere Motive at a metaphysical level:

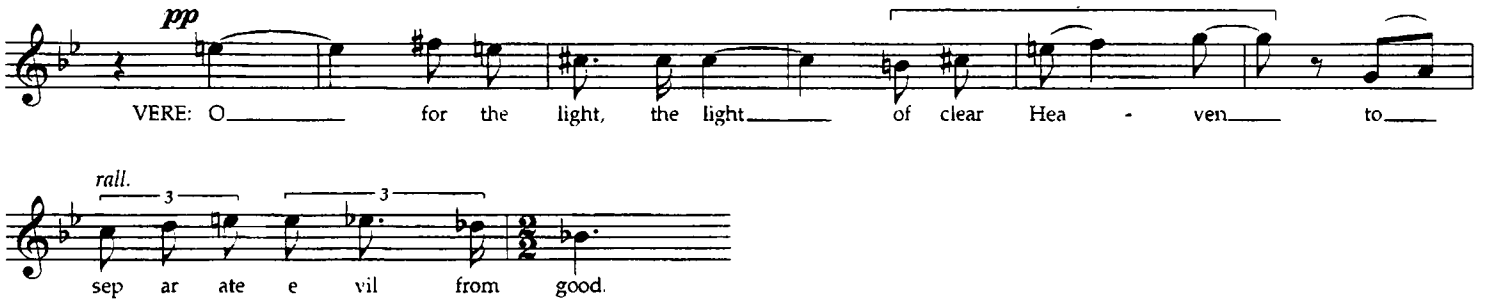
Ex. 4, ii, a. The Starry Vere Motive (I.1, Fig. 56 *et seq.*)



Ex. 4, ii, b. Vere's First Prayer version (I.2, Fig. 7 63)



Ex. 4, ii, c. Vere's Second Prayer version (II.1, Fig. 7 50)



This motive is a recognisable shape that appears in another network of thematic reference that cumulatively indicates Vere's spiritual bearings related to the idea of Classical 'fate' (cf. *Lucretia*):

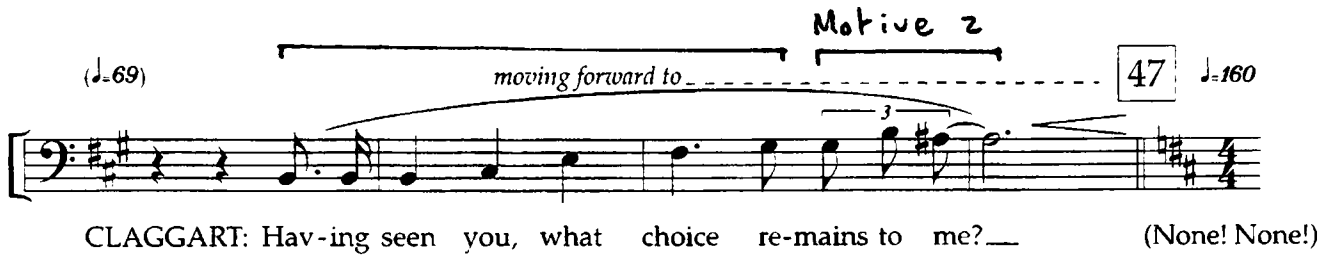
Ex. 4, ii, d. Novice's Theme as inversion



Ex. 4, ii, e. Novice's instrumental version/inversion



Ex. 4, ii, f. Claggart's Aria version (I.2, Fig. [4]107)



Ex. 4, ii, g. The Officers version (II.2, Fig. [2]92)



These versions, varying semitones, tones, and major and minor thirds, might be said to expressively modify the 'good' image the initial 'Starry Vere' represents.

Textual and musical convergence between Vere and Claggart, clarifying Vere's repressed dark side, and musical convergence between Vere and his Officers who carry out his will, explicated as the operation of 'fate', is logical where the music is considered as an embodiment of Vere's fatalistic sense of guilt. However the implied textual and musical convergence between Vere and the Novice, whose music simultaneously inverts a 'Starry Vere' version, is striking and requires closer investigation.

2. The Novice as symbol of suffering

Britten himself explicitly saw the dramatic purpose of the Novice in terms of 'Stations of the Cross'.[19] However as the first act unfolds it becomes clear that the Novice not only represents the suffering of Christ on some level, but he also symbolizes Judas' betrayal of Christ in his betrayal of Billy at Claggart's bidding.

Certainly the musical and textual material shared by Vere and the Novice suggests Vere's recognition (his dark side uppermost) of his being implicated in the Novice's ordeal, while simultaneously identifying with the Novice, a situation that will be repeated with Billy. Vere's identification with but simultaneous implication in the suffering of the Novice may be viewed as a dramatic manifestation of Keller's observation of a passive-aggressive repression of sadism in Britten's art. This metaphysical level of operations perfectly complements Britten's designing of the Novice to evoke our sympathy about the repressive, sadistic regime on board Vere's *Indomitable*. Such a reading would explicate these points of convergence:

1. Vere's 'I have been lost on the infinite sea' (Prologue, Fig. 3^{11}, Epilogue, Fig. 143), is recapitulated by the Novice (and ship's company) after his flogging (I.1, Fig. 44).

2. The Novice's 'My heart's broken!' (Fig. 43^{7}) anticipates Vere's 'My heart's broken, my life's broken' (II.2, Fig. 75^{7}).

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[19] Coleman-Piper 1951:25. The Novice is only mentioned briefly by Melville 1967:346, Ch. 9. Britten's operatic use of the strangely sensual alto saxophone sonority in the Novice's music is as striking as its plangent presence in the *Sinfonia*.

3. The Novice's cry 'It's fate!' referring to his suffering, is a further disclosure of Vere's rationalization of responsibility for his own actions (Epilogue) after the manner of *Lucretia*.[20]

The gradual corruption of the Novice may symbolize dualism in Vere's recollection of the loss of his own purity of motive in his dealings with Billy, i.e. the Novice's symbolizing of both Christ and Judas is a projection of a dualism in Vere's view of himself in both his 'Starry Vere' and 'Claggart' aspects. The unrelieved suffering of the Novice, as opposed to the redemptive suffering offered in Christianity shown through Billy, introduces a theme of suffering as a self-glorifying end in itself, anticipated in *Lucretia*, proving important to the metaphysical aspects of *War Requiem*, *Wingrave* and, ultimately, *Venice*.

Vere's swing between guilt and the quest for some kind of forgiveness as he recalls the events is suggested by the convergent Agony Motive, utilizing the minor sixth to fifth formerly associated with Peter and Ellen in *Grimes*:

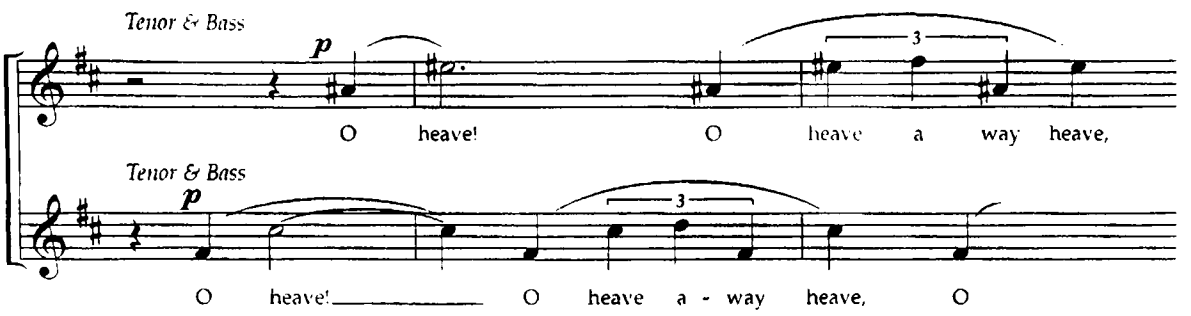
Ex. 4, iii, a. The Agony Motive, Prologue (Fig. 3^3)



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[20] 'It is *Lucretia* with which *Budd* may be the most fruitfully compared both spiritually and stylistically' (Mitchell 1995:381).

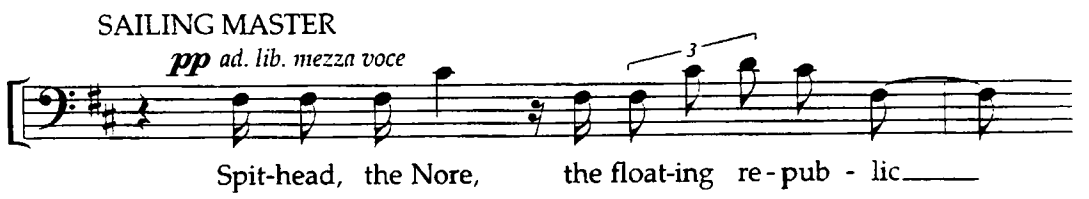
Ex. 4, iii, b. The Agony Motive in the choral opening (I.1, Fig. 7[3])



Ex. 4, iii, c. The Agony Motive in Billy's aria (I.1, Fig. 33)



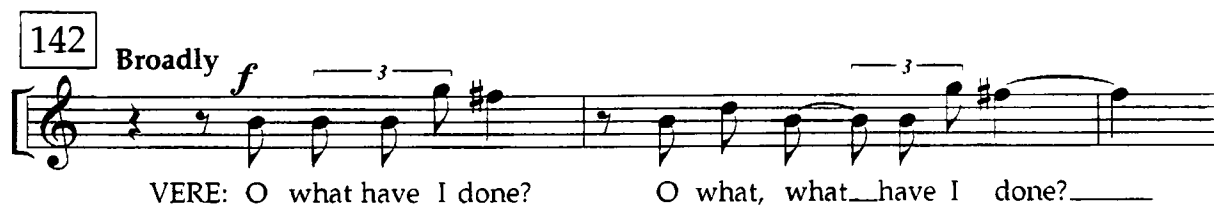
Ex. 4, iii, d. The Agony Motive recalling 'mutiny' (I.2, Fig. 67[2])



Ex. 4, iii, e. The Agony Motive in the choral wordless response to Billy's execution



Ex. 4, iii, f. The Agony Motive in Vere's Epilogue (Fig. 142)



So, to summarize, Vere rationalizes the Novice's sufferings – as he will with Billy – as a necessary sacrifice to the maintenance of his position of power and authority on board the *Indomitable* – the name of the ship itself a clue to such operations. Thus his later execution of 'Billy-as-Christian' is an outward

manifestation of the execution of Christ within himself on the altar of worldly vainglory:

> VERE
> The mists have cleared. O terror! what do I see?
> Scylla and Charybdis, the straights of hell. [...]
> It is not his trial, it is mine, mine. It is I whom the devil awaits. [...]
> Before what tribunal do I stand if I destroy goodness? [...]
> The angel of God has struck and the angel must hang – through me.

This sacrificing of an agent of God in order to sustain worldly power, prestige, and glory in the eyes of men is the theme of *Grimes* and *Lucretia* demonstrated *par-excellance*. Vere's 'moral problem' is not securing the forgiveness or benediction of the 'angel', as he correctly discerns, but of the God who sent him, and before whom he will stand at the final tribunal (cf. the Queen's Epilogue, *Gloriana*).

4. The Interview Chords as 'language': a genealogy

The celebrated Interview Chords (II.2, Figs. 102 to curtain) are a sequence of triads in which Britten re-harmonizes the pitches of the F major triad (Ex. 4, iv). Until now it has been commonly assumed that this sequence, which sounds in the orchestra as Vere meets privately with Billy to deliver the sentence of death reached by the Drumhead Court, only describes all that passes between Billy and Vere in the closed cabin. However, closer study of the ensuing dramaturgy discloses that this 'hidden scene' may reveal more than this, and it is precisely music without text that communicates such revelations.

One of the opera's earliest commentators observed that the Interview Chords have a specifically religious significance.[21] Auden's insights into Melville – published the same year as the opera's first performance (1951, it had been published in 1950 in the USA) – are useful in this respect:

> Melville seems to have been aware that something must happen to Billy to change him from the unconscious Adam into the conscious Christ but, in terms of his fable, he cannot make this explicit and the decisive transition has to take place off-stage in the final interview between Billy and Captain Vere.[22]

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[21] Campbell 1952:20.

[22] Auden 1951:122. Auden's view of *Budd*, shaped in part by Forster's, may have influenced Britten earlier, regardless of whether he ever subsequently saw them in print.

Ex. 4, iv, The Interview Chords



Interview Chord Sequence:
F–**A**–D^{b}–C–d–A^{b}–D–b^{b}–a–B^{b}–A^{b}–f–C–f$^{\#}$–B^{b}–c– [Fig. ^{1}103]
A–**F**–C–F–D–F–C–f$^{\#}$–F–A^{b}–F–C–D^{b}–F–C–F–D–C

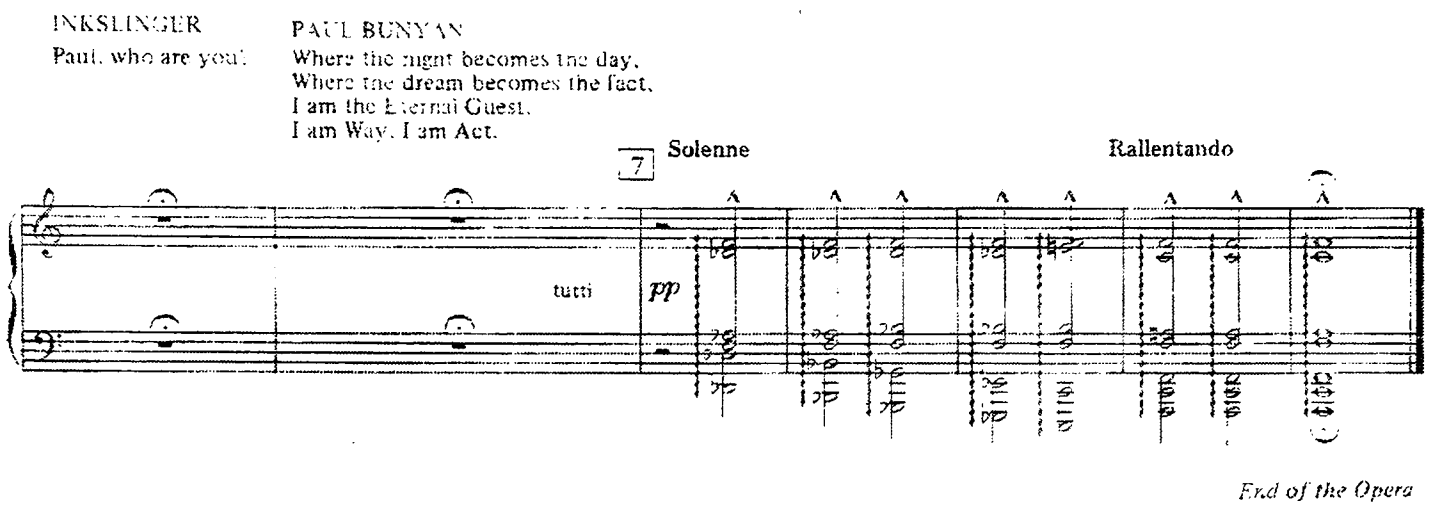
What has not been clearly drawn out in subsequent Britten scholarship is the relevance of such a 'decisive transition' in religious terms for Vere and Billy respectively, as the presence of the Interview Chords in their respective final arias indicates. Additionally there are a number of specific precedents,

and an important consequent, in Britten's particular and distinctive operatic use of the F major triad. In each case the triad is used in a religious context:[23]

a. *BUNYAN*

In the Litany coda, as Bunyan reveals his quasi-divine identity to Johnny Inkslinger (Fig. 7), Britten reharmonises the note F in a sequence of chords with a bass descending in thirds, 'resolving' into the F major triad: D^{b}–b^{7}–G^{b7}–E^{b9} (missing third) –C^{11}–F–F–F:[24]

Ex. 4, v. *Bunyan*, Litany, concluding chords



(The orchestral polyrhythmic ascending scalic gesture, linking the music of the Litany with Bunyan's final disclosure (Fig. 6), is similar to that accompanying the hanging of Billy, Fig. 131 *et seq.*)

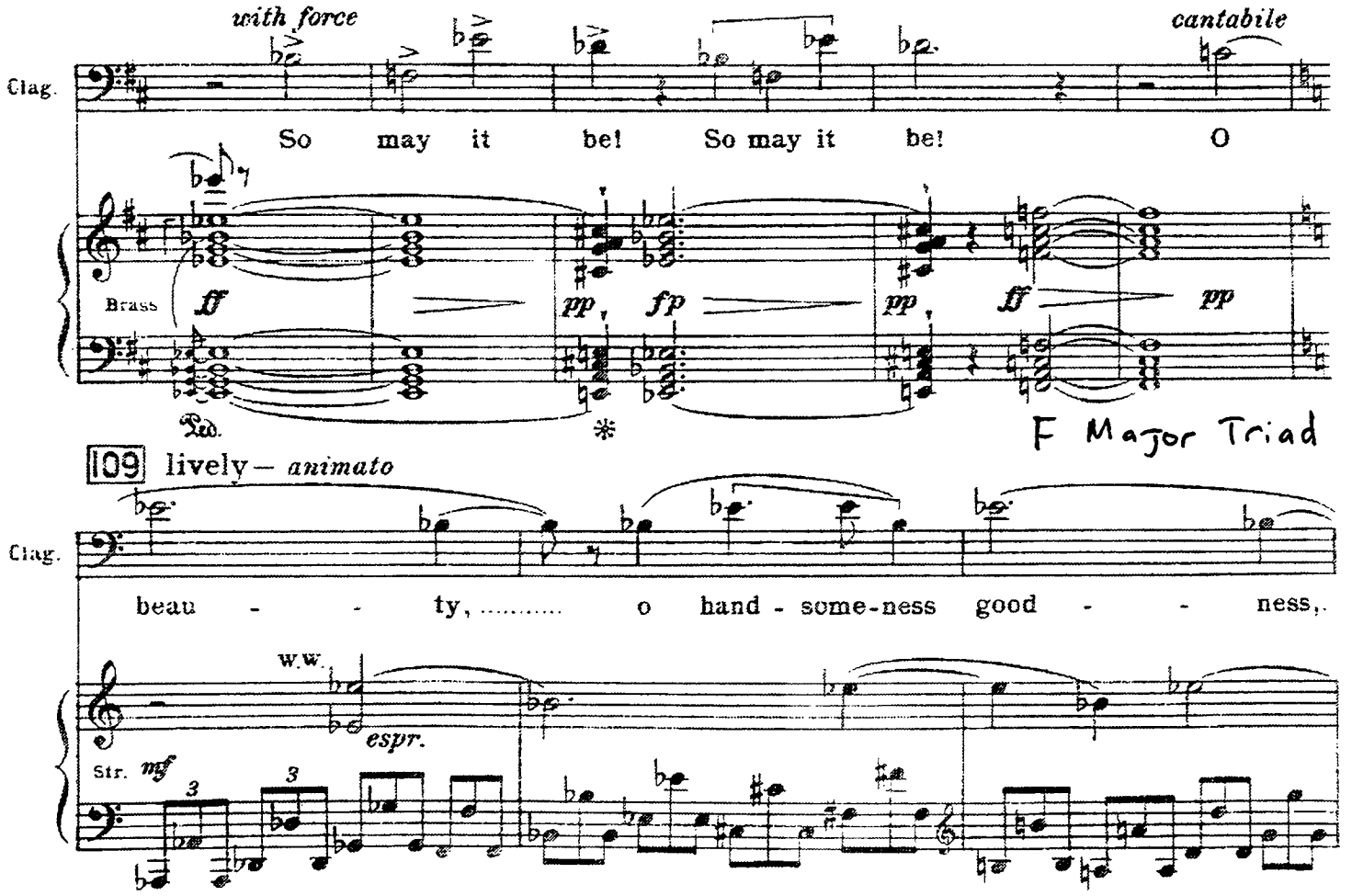
This process can be related to the Interview Chords. The *Bunyan* Litany b^{b}–F 'progression' – the B^{b} related back to the Slim–Tiny Love Duet and subsequent Hymn – is reversed in *Budd* via the 'progression' from the

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[23] The following analysis acknowledges that triads are also employed elsewhere by Britten 'naturally' and not necessarily symbolically. What is being identified here is Britten's gestural use of triadic sequences in a manner suggestive of symbolic use in an operatic context.
[24] Britten's reharmonisation of a single note in a 'religious' context may be traced back to 'Jesu, as Thou art our Saviour' from *A Boy Was Born* (1933, the pitch B).

'purified' F major of the Interview Chords to Vere's Epilogue B^b major triad. In *Bunyan*, b^b–F is the progression from the world of corporate instinct to the world of individual choice with clear Christian overtones (even if parodied). In *Budd*, F–B^b charts Vere's resignation to a Classical 'fate' (cf. Grimes' F–B^b 'So be it! And God have mercy upon me!'). Any attempt to interpret the Interview Chords as a 'purifying' process in F, expunging Claggart's distinctive f minor in order that Vere's C major can 'pass through' F major to the Epilogue B^b (i.e. through his cycle of fifths), has to take into account the massive F major chords in Claggart's aria (I.3) at the words 'So may it be!' (i.e. 'With hate and envy I am stronger than love', Fig. ^{2}109) and 'Nothing!' (i.e. 'Nothing can defend [Billy]!', Fig. ^{14}110):

Ex. 4, vi. Claggart's F major triads in his aria (I.3)





On the basis of Keller's insight, the transformation of f minor into F major could be heard as representing a change within Vere from the 'guilty guilt' (f minor) of Claggart (i.e. Vere's identification and repression of total guilt) to a new 'guilty innocence' (F major) that enables Vere to rationalize 'I should have saved him [i.e. I am guilty] [...] But he has saved me and blessed me [i.e. I am now innocent on Billy's account]' in his Epilogue.[25] In these respects it is striking that the series of 'Death–Fate' figures sung by a single bass-baritone in *Venice*, infusing Aschenbach at a metaphysical level with the 'plague', are introduced as a Traveller in f minor, an extension of Aschenbach's interior f minor that opens the opera.

It is clear during the scene of the drumhead court that Vere (whose name derives from *veritas*, lit. 'truth') has great powers of rationalization.[26] Claggart is recalled in the fourths of Vere's aria (II.2, Fig. 74 *et seq.*) and the f minor of Vere's response to the court's judgement on Billy ('I accept their verdict', Fig. 97 *et seq.*). Having successfully repressed his Claggart-like dark side, Vere's music can pass from his previous defining C major (which in

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[25] Whittall (1990):145–71 gives the fullest account of the profound equivocation of F major – and of any central 'tonality' – after the Interview Chords.
[26] Manlove (Pullin 1978:276–77).

Britten nearly always symbolizes innocence or virtue, cf. *Lucretia*) through F (the Interview Chords in which he rationalizes his need to execute Billy) to his B^{b} 'temporary salvation' (Epilogue). The ensuing flat inflections dogging Vere's vocal line, hinting at f minor ('and my mind can go back in peace'), confirms Claggart's ghostly presence in the opera's closing moments in a manner anticipating Quint's in the Governess' music at the end of the *Screw* (Fig. 144[8]).

b. *GRIMES*

Ellen's F major 'peace' triad combined with the pedal F Creed of the off-stage Borough worship service leading to Peter's decisive B^{b} cadence is a further precedent (II.1, Fig. [9]16, *et seq.*). This 'progression', another reversal of the *Bunyan* Litany b^{b}/B^{b}–F, delineates Peter's damnation, not his salvation. His words, 'God have mercy upon me!', indicate a resignation to fate rather than a prayer for mercy (cf. Aschenbach's statement 'Let the gods do what they will with me' at the end of his Dionysian dream in a vocal line inscribing f minor–major, *Venice*, II.13, Fig. 287[13]). The religious background is palpable.

c. *WAR REQUIEM*

The consequent example is Britten's distinctive use of the F major triad in the three *a cappella* cadences of *War Requiem*. It has been felt that any 'peace' or 'rest' this triad signifies becomes increasingly remote and inconclusive on

each occasion.[27] This genealogy of the F major triad in Britten, in which the Interview Chords play a seminal role, is revelatory to the spiritual aspect of *War Requiem,* and this has important retrospective ramifications for *Budd.*

d. Other relevant triadic examples

Canticle III: *Abraham and Isaac* (1952), contains a triadic sequence accompanying Abraham's announcement to his beloved son that he must be sacrificed according to God's will. This has great impact in the parody of Canticle II during the Offertorium of *War Requiem* where Abram, like Vere but unlike the Biblical Abraham, sacrifices his son. The Canticle was written in the aftermath of *Budd.*

The intensely personal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* (1958, but not published until 1963) for voice and piano, finds Britten setting poetry in which 'a fusion of Lutheran theology and fervent Hellenism [which] formed Hölderlin's attitude to the poet's task' matches the sacred–profane ethos of the composer's musical aesthetic.[28] The same-sex eroticism overtly indicated in the 'Sokrates und Alcibiades' is accompanied by a triadic sequence, a striking gesture in the *Budd* context regarding the Vere and Claggart convergence. (This impression is amplified by Britten's use of triads in 'Villes' and 'Antique' from *Les Illuminations,* the latter setting dedicated to Britten's early love, Wulff Scherchen.)

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[27] Evans 1979/96:456, 464 and Cooke 1996:62, 77.
[28] Evans 1979/96:365.

In respect to Britten's merging of areas of guilt with religion in his work, it is retroactively significant for *Budd* that the interaction of Melville's, Hölderlin's and Christ's texts occur in a later work, *Voices for Today* (1965):

> Dismantle the fort,
> Cut down the fleet–
> Battle no more shall be!
> Melville
>
> Give us back a heart, a lasting hope in life. Innocent peace!
> Silence the raging battle with Heaven's melodies of peace.
> Hölderlin
>
> If you have ears to hear, then hear!
> Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you.
> How blessed are the peacemakers; God shall call them his sons.
> If you have ears to hear, then hear!
> Jesus Christ

In the intervening period Britten's use of triads to signify love and sleep in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is significant (opening music and, particularly, the triads on twelve-note roots as the lovers awaken, III Fig. 20 *et seq.*). Later in Britten's work, the triadic setting of 'The Auld Aik' ('The Old Oak') concluding the Soutar song-cycle *Where Are These Children* (1969) – a cycle about death in war – in which the *Grimes* tritone is polarized as A ('We were sae shair it wud aye be there', cf. Ellen = faith) with E^{b} ('But noo it's doun', cf. Peter and the Borough), is profoundly suggestive of the failure of love and Britten's 'increasing disillusionment with man' (cf. the A–E^{b} of Claggart's 1.3 aria).[29] Britten stated '[The Old Oak] really *is* down, you see;

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[29] Pears (Blyth 1981:22–23).

it's the end of everything'.[30] This triadic connection has retroactive implications for Vere as well as direct implications for the Peace Aria of *Wingrave* as the Soutar cycle was composed (Spring–Summer 1969) while Britten was composing *Wingrave* (April 1969–August 1970).

This genealogy of Britten's triadic gestural usage can be seen to act as a kind of commentary on the Interview Chords but not necessarily in terms of an interaction between Vere and Billy only. It is this other interaction that will now be explored.

5. Billy's and Vere's different responses to the Interview Chords

a. Billy (Christian salvation)

The operatic Billy takes a different direction after his hidden interview with Vere from that of Melville's novella:

> [In the treatment of Christianity, Britten's *Budd*] significantly departs from the novel, where Melville, and by implication Billy, maintains a notable scepticism about, or even indifference to, the consolation of Christianity proffered by the Chaplain. The librettists and the composer, however, excise any overt doubts, and introduce both Billy's image 'of the good boy hung and gone to glory' and his radiant vision of the 'far-shining sail that's not Fate. [...] Oh, I'm contented'. This is a reconciliation over and above the reconciliation with Vere and is a dimension added to Melville. It is undeniably backed up by music of overpowering intensity. But one questions, nonetheless, the conviction behind the expression of faith. Did it have its roots, perhaps, in Britten's reluctance to face the consequences of his own bleak philosophy? Could he not bear to listen to what, elsewhere, his own voice was saying?[31]

The dualism identified here between 'Christianity' and 'bleak philosophy' in Britten's 'own voice' is precisely the dualism between the trajectories of Billy

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[30] Carpenter 1992:498.

[31] Mitchell (Cooke–Reed:1993:170, fn. 24).

and Vere after the Interview Chords. For Vere it is the 'bleak philosophy' of temporary salvation in contrast to the Christian affirmation of Billy's eternal salvation that is seen as Vere's 'main moral problem', Britten's own term for his attraction to the character (i.e. the spiritual problem is never resolved). The critical scene between Billy and the Chaplain, which leads to the operatic Billy's Christian conversion, is not seen. However, it is related in the ensuing scene (II.3). Billy, who is in the Darbies, relates this incident to Dansker, the old sea-salt and his shipmate friend (Figs. 112–13):

> BILLY
> Chaplain's been here before you.
> Kind
> And good his story, of the good boy hung and gone to glory,
> Hung for the likes of me, the likes of me.

This moment in the opera is signal:

> [Billy's Christian] awareness (however primitively expressed) is [...] denied him in Melville's original tale, and it finds its ecstatic fulfilment in the [Darbies scene].[32]

In making Billy recognize his sinful state before Christ and his need for repentance, Britten and his librettists remove the exclusive burden of Melville's 'Christ-type' from Billy's character (i.e. he is not so much presented as Christ in Auden's formulation, rather than as a convert to Christ in the manner of the *Lucretia* Male and Female Chorus).[33] In this important respect Britten's Billy does grasp the meaning and personal application of the

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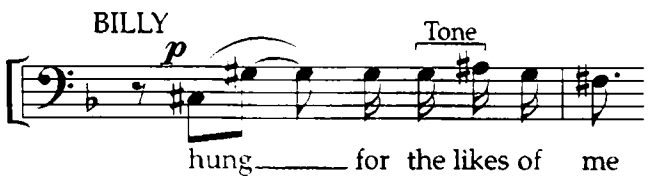
[32] Mitchell 1995:380.

[33] Cf. Forster's letter to Britten, 20 Dec. 1948, 'Billy *is* our Saviour, yet he is Billy, not Christ or Orion' (Forster 1985: 234–35).

Christian message and is redeemed according to that system in operatic terms, at least in Vere's mind, unlike Melville's unregenerate Billy.[34]

The music to which Billy recounts his turning to Christ is in a coloured A major (cf. Vere's prayers, Ex. 4, ii, b–c) in which, briefly but critically, the Agony Motive is 'corrected' into a major sixth (compare Ex. 4, iii, a–f):

Ex. 4, vii. Billy's recollection of his interview with the Chaplain



Given the importance of A major here and in Billy's Darbies aria, we note that in the Interview Chord sequence (Ex. 4, iv) the second triad following the first F major triad, is a blazing A major (tutti, *ff*). The seventeenth and eighteenth triads, which are the very heart of the Interview sequence (Fig. [1]103 brass *pp*, and Fig. 103 woodwind *ppp* respectively), are A major followed by F major (i.e. a retrograde of the opening two triads). In this double-juxtaposition of the F major–A major/A major–F major triads Britten might musically indicate the Chaplain and Billy interview.

In chronological terms the Interview Chords simultaneously cover both interviews, between Billy–Chaplain and Billy–Vere. In this sense the Interview Chords stop operatic 'real time' in a manner akin to aria, clinching the transformations of two beings: Billy into a Christian and Vere into a man

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[34] Melville 1967:397–98, Ch. 24.

who has knowingly repressed his dark side.[35] The Interview Chords then proceed directly back into operatic 'real time' for Billy's Christian response in his Darbies scene (II.3) and, subsequently, Vere's fatalistic response in the Epilogue, mediated by the re-appearance of the Chords in the 'Execution Interlude' that begins II.4 at the moment Vere arrives on deck to witness the execution (Figs. 128–29):

Execution Interlude 'Interview' Sequence:

*E–G–A^{b}–C–$c^{\#}$–B–f–E [the last triad sounds as Billy enters]

*This E is preceded by a chord of E–B^{b}–D^{b}, suggesting a diminished chord of the 7^{th}, complete with *diabolus* tritone (between Billy's E and Vere's B^{b}) as Vere walks onstage.

This 'Christianisation' of Billy transforms the use of religious imagery from the ironic (i.e. unlike Melville) into an important part of the symbolic associations made in Vere's recalling of events. This is regardless of whether the 'real' Billy, in operatic terms, was actually converted or not. What is important is the operatic 'fact' that in Vere's memory Billy was converted, that Vere needs must remember him becoming a Christian. This appears to be as much Britten's point as his making the Novice into both a kind of crucified Christ, as he himself stated, and subsequent Judas in Act I. Such

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[35] Nothing in opera can be in 'real time', and here the term is used relatively, e.g. the drumhead court scene.

transformations from Melville may partly explain Forster's noted complaint of Britten's 'over-intense Christianity'.[36]

This new Christian dynamic applies to the dramaturgical significance of Dansker's bringing Billy a 'bit of biscuit' and 'the last parting cup' as well as fellowship (Billy: 'Done me a lot of good – a drink, and seeing a friend') which now carries greater resonance in the opera as symbolic of a kind of nautical 'Last Supper'. Billy's benediction upon Vere (Billy: 'Starry Vere, God bless you!'), both in the Darbies scene (Fig. ^{3}114) and immediately before his execution (^{2}131, echoed by his shipmates), also loses much of its Melvillian irony precisely because it has now become a locus of Vere's memory connected with Billy's Christian conversion. This 'Christian glow' spreads to Billy's final instructions to Dansker (Billy: 'Dansker of the *Indomitable*, help [Vere], all of you') and Vere's description of Billy's burial in his Epilogue (Fig. 140):

> VERE
> We committed his body to the deep.
> The sea-fowl enshadowed him with their wings,
> Their harsh cries were his requiem.

In light of the new Christian element, compounded by the use of the reference to 'requiem', Billy's burial at sea and his being attended by the sea-fowl – in his earliest aria Billy identified himself as 'King of the birds' – suggests

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[36] Harewood 1981:86. 'The fact that my rejection [of Christianity] is not vehement does not save it from being tenacious. [...] I no longer wish to save or be saved' (Forster 1998:317-18). It may be ironic that in spite of Forster's stated passive-aggressive stance towards Christianity, he may have initially failed to comprehend Britten's deployment of his own position through the Vere and Claggart convergence. Forster was later to refer to *Budd* as 'my *Nunc Dimittis*' (Furbank 1978:146).

analogues of both baptism (burial at sea) and the Holy Spirit (the birds). Although ironic in Melville, Britten's deliberate foregrounding of Billy's Christian element in the opera – balancing the Christian component in *Lucretia* – strengthens the new sequence concerning Billy's spiritual development from a Christian perspective.

In summation of these developments, Billy's 'response' to the Interview Chords in his Darbies aria is significant.

> BILLY
> [Interpolation of Interview Chords]
> But I've sighted a sail in the storm,
> The far-shining sail that's not fate,
> And I'm ***contented,**
> **I've seen where she's bound for.**
> She has a land of her own where she'll anchor ***for ever.**
> Oh, I'm contented.
> Don't matter now being hanged, or being forgotten and caught in the weeds.
> Don't matter now.
> ***I'm strong**, and I know it, and I'll stay strong,
> I'll stay strong and that's all, all, all,
> And that's enough, that's enough, that's enough.[37]

*** = A major triads**

Billy's 'Interview' Sequence:

A–A–D^{b}–F–A–D^{b}–F–D–a–$F^{\#}$–D^{b}–A^{b}–f–d–B^{b}–C–D^{b}–F–C–D–F–C–$F^{\#}$–F–B^{b}–F–C

Billy has sighted a new paradigm for life 'that's not fate'. This is an important aspect of Billy's Christian response to the Interview Chords that is tellingly distinct from Vere's in the Epilogue.

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[37] As with *Grimes*, one notes Britten's triple (Trinitarian?) text repetitions: 'strong', 'all', 'enough', in which the composer himself did not believe as an adult.

Billy's A major cadences here indicate, in keeping with Britten's relational use of tonal symbolism, Vere's Apollonian idealization of Billy (Fig. 117 to Billy's final C major triad at Fig. [1]119, the latter key ironically identifying Vere earlier, perhaps indicating Vere's 'guilty innocence' in terms of the *Lucretia dénouement*).[38] In *Venice*, Aschenbach's A major apprehension of Tadzio as Hellenistic Apollonian god may be considered an extension of such key symbolism.[39]

Thus the Christian implication in the way Britten's Billy dies in Vere's memory, with peace and forgiveness (he has indeed found Grimes' 'harbour that shelters peace'), shines that much more convincingly. This resultantly tilts a heavier burden onto the Vere Epilogue.

b. Vere ('temporary salvation')

A simple textual and musical comparison of the moment of connection between Billy's and Vere's respective responses to the Interview Chords discloses an essential divergence in spite of the apparent convergence of the triads themselves: whereas Billy has sighted 'the far-shining sail that's not fate' Vere has only sighted 'the far-shining sail'. This divergence is an important connection between the frames of *Lucretia* and *Budd*.[40] As with *Lucretia*, the issue of fate is again raised, and 'the concept of fate excludes the

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[38] Melville makes the direct connection of Billy with Apollo in chapter one.
[39] For a list of examples proving the widely accepted fact that A major is Britten's 'Apollonian' key, see Cooke–Reed 1993:165, fn. 5.
[40] Mitchell 1995:381–84.

concept of sin' becomes an essential division between the Classical and Christian viewpoint:[41]

> EPILOGUE
> VERE
> [Interpolation of Interview Chords]
> I was lost on the infinite sea, but I've sighted a sail in the storm,
> the far-shining sail, and I'm ***content**.
> I've seen where she's bound for.
> There's a land where she'll anchor for ever,
> where she'll anchor for ever.
> [I am an old man now, and my mind can go back in peace
> to that far-away summer of seventeen hundred and ninety seven, long ago now, years ago, centuries ago, when I,
> Edward Fairfax Vere, commanded the *Indomitable*.]

*** = A major triad**

> Vere's 'Interview' Sequence:

F–C–F–C–a–F–C–B^{b}–A–F–C–A^{b}–f–D–a–d–A^{b}–B^{b} ['salvation' chord prolonged]

Whereas the operatic Billy has passed from a primitive acceptance of an abstract fate into a state of Christian salvation, Vere is ultimately unable to renounce Classicism and obtain the same spiritual state as the Billy he recalls. Musically this is accomplished by the semitonal difference between Billy's final A major cadences and Vere's final B^{b} major triad. Vere's Classical bent is revealed in the opera at the beginning of I.2, and his prayer to God flows from his Classical preoccupations (cf. Ex. 4, ii, b):

> [Vere is in his cabin, sitting, reading. He lays down his book.]
> VERE
> Plutarch – the Greeks and the Romans – their troubles and ours are the same.
> May their virtues be ours, and their courage!
> O God, grant me light to guide us, to guide us all!

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[41] Howard 1969:38.

(This reference to Plutarch, also author of *Erotikos*, is not in Melville.[42]) Vere's intoning of 'virtue', with its associations of moral performance and chastity, recalls similar Classical concerns in *Lucretia*.

Vere's observations in the Prologue have nothing to do with a moral view of sin and redemption in Christian terms – in spite of his references to 'good' and 'evil' – but with Classical notions of aesthetic perfection as a sign of goodness.[43] This interpretation of Billy in terms of his physical excellence and primitively naïve goodness is projected onto many of the men in the unfolding drama, but none more so than Vere and Claggart.[44] Such Classical associations of physical excellence and outward moral excellence (later explored in *Venice*) are bound up with worldly notions of 'Glory' as discussed in *Lucretia*, and nothing to do with the Christian emphasis on the heart. In the drama itself, Claggart warns Vere of this 'flawed' view – the word is used deliberately because it is a component of Vere's 'phenomenal pride', the source of his 'moral problem' (II.1, Fig. ^{2}44):

> CLAGGART [to Vere]
> Ah! Pleasant looks, good temper, they're but a mask,
> He is deep, deep.
> You do but note his outwards, the flower of masculine beauty and strength.
> He is deep, deep.
> A man-trap lurks under those ruddy-tipped daisies!

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[42] Vere's obscure Classical reference to Claggart as a 'veritable Argus' (I.2), also not in Melville, is another example of the 'Classical paradigm' he shares with Aschenbach.

[43] A rhetorical way of putting this might be: 'If Adam had a stammer, would God have banished him from Eden?'

[44] Theodor Uppman, the creator of Billy, recounted how Britten said to him 'Ted, I want you to be your natural, good, self. You are Billy Budd, so let your inner radiance emerge and don't think too much about the other characters.' Uppman added, 'if I knew then what I know now about those other characters, I would have been very concerned indeed' (Interview, New York, 6 Dec. 2002).

Billy's stammer, which causes the physical death of Claggart and threatens Vere's perpetuity on board the *Indomitable*, leads to an execution that, ironically, Vere considers to have 'saved' him. Indeed, in a situation anticipating the *Screw*, it is precisely the flaw in Britten's Vere that leads to Billy's Christian salvation at the cost of his own soul. If so, Billy's stammer is not the flaw Vere holds it to be but, in effect, the source of his own 'temporary salvation' in political terms. The stammer led Billy into an act of manslaughter, which Vere legalistically utilizes as an act of premeditated mutinous murder. This resultantly leads Vere, knowingly, into the sins of bearing false witness and being accessory to the execution of a man whom he knows to be innocent:

> Melville's aim is thus to sharpen the conflict to an extreme; thereby to show, first, how the survival of civilization is founded ultimately on the rejection of the individual and of truth, and second, that such rejection involves alignment with Claggart and the forces of darkness.[45]

Vere not only uses the law to smother his conscience and, possibly, the 'evils' that reside in his subconscious (i.e. Vere uses the existence of 'earthly laws' to

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[45] Manlove (Pullin 1978:276–77), 280. Manlove's assertion that Vere manipulates principles as 'a mask for self-preservation' is further supported by an investigation of McArthur (1813) which appends article XXII of the *Articles of War* (1749) – the article cited by the First Lieutenant at the execution of Billy in the opera (II.4, Fig. 130, an inclusion that might be used to counter a claim that the background role of the *Articles of War* in Billy's trial is a red-herring) – by drawing a clear distinction between murder and manslaughter, the latter definition clearly applying to Billy. Britten retains the specific date of 1797 from Melville in Vere's Prologue and Epilogue. This is a full five years after the publication of McArthur's treatise with which any Captain on a British 'Man-o-War' would have been expected to be familiar. In addition someone in Vere's position would have known that a Fleet Commander, not a ship's Captain, was the only person of rank permitted by law to preside over a Court Martial that invoked the death penalty. Also Cooke–Reed 1993:158, fn. 9. Manlove's subsequent identification (not quoted) of Melville's *Budd* as essentially a struggle between 'land' and 'sea' is striking given Pears' original scenario of *Grimes* (Chapter 2).

remove his moral agency, or to conceal from himself his own evil), he also uses it to ramify his belief in an inviolable 'fate' that removes moral obligations. Exs. 4, ii, a–g make thematic connections between the Starry Vere Motive and a non-Christian idea of fate in which man has no freedom of choice. It is precisely in this way that Vere justifies his actions to himself, and the dropping of Billy's 'that's not fate' from his Epilogue identifies the gulf between Vere's and Billy's spiritual natures (i.e. through the mechanism of 'fate' Vere is able to rationalize his sin, enabling him to become a 'guilty innocent').[46]

There are further difficulties with Vere's 'salvation'. Billy's A cadences in his Darbies aria are a semitone away from Vere's B^{b} and the semitonal conflict has been, from the Prologue's B^{b} major–b minor tension, the source of irresolution. A major is the relative major in the dominant of b minor. On the other hand f minor is the parallel key in the dominant of B^{b} major.[47] This difference is reflected in the greater degree of dissonance between Vere's melodic lines against the Interview Chords documented elsewhere.[48] These 'key' relationships are more significant if the wide spacing of the bitonal chord (Prologue, bar 4), with B^{b} in the bass register and b in the high register, are related to the symbolic physical spacing of the ship, with Claggart below

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[46] In this sense the observation that Vere's B^{b} is inclusively symbolic of both his 'salvation' and 'authority', because Vere 'sees his salvation partly in terms of the justification given to his actions by his own clearly-defined authority', may be viewed as the mechanism by which Vere justifies his sin as 'guilty innocence' – a projection of his 'phenomenal pride' (Cooke–Reed 1993:91).

[47] Cooke–Reed 1993:90. Cooke is unequivocal about Billy = A, Vere = B^{b}.

[48] Whittall 1990: 162 ff.

deck, Vere on deck, and Billy in the rigging as 'King of the Birds'.[49] In this reading the B^b element is aligned with Claggart's subterranean level.

There is also the immediate problem of the earlier repressive use of B^b against Billy's E at his death and the sailors' subsequent wordless emotions (Fig. 138 *et seq.*). In addition the timpani rhythm throughout the Epilogue, in Britten's mind from the earliest sketches, is clearly related to the rhythm of war via the battle music of II.1 and, more particularly, the specific rhythm of Vere's entrance during the Execution Interlude 'Interview' sequence (II.4, Fig. 128 *et seq.*, see above).[50] Both exist in the moment of Vere's 'triumph' in the Epilogue.

As with Grimes' and Lucretia's inability to respond to the grace personified by Ellen and Collatinus in the respective earlier operas, Vere is ultimately unable to attain the salvation in Christ modelled for him by Billy. Vere's idolizing of Billy's perfection – it is Billy who he claims to have saved him, not the Christ that saved Billy – is his own fatal flaw, as Claggart identified.

Philosophically Britten, who was opposed to violence and power, and Forster would not automatically be predisposed to side with Vere over Billy.[51] Yet the issue of violence and power as it relates to sexual aggression is

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[49] Mitchell (Cooke–Reed 1993:112, 117–119) emphasises this physical triple-layered dimension of the set as a 'spiritual order'.
[50] Reed 1995:249.
[51] 'I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country' (Forster 1938/58/65:78).

a more complex issue with both composer and author, and Britten's identification of his interest in Vere is striking in this respect.[52] If the 'war-like' timpani in the Epilogue are considered an extension of symbolized sexual frustration in the II.1 battle scene – the g minor moral 'mist', relative minor to the B^b major Epilogue climax – the sexual undertone of the Vere convergence becomes more ominous, not least in the implication of a libidinously motivated destruction of a Christian boy (cf. Ex. 6, b–c and *Curlew River*).[53] The sexual issues behind the *Bunyan* Fight–Love Duet, Peter's ambiguous relationship to the boy apprentices in *Grimes* and Lucretia's ambiguous psycho-sexual response to the violence of the rape resulting in an act of self-violence can be connected with the Vere outlined here.

In Vere's closing words, incorporating Claggart's f minor, there is a clear indication of a link to the opening Prologue and the strong suggestion of Vere's continual re-treading of the same memories that, far from 'saving' him in any Christian sense, have bound him and confined him to endless cycles of replay via the unrepentant 'guilt' (Claggart) lying behind the mask of 'Starry Truth' (Vere).

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[52] Britten (*BBC*) 1960.

[53] It may be said that Forster's original criticism that the music of Claggart's aria did not describe the 'sexual discharge gone evil' indicates his misapprehension of Britten's distribution of this aspect through the Vere convergence, anticipating that of the Governess and Quint (Mitchell:1994). The 'evil' here, as in the *Screw*, is communicated primarily by the music.

Summary

The antithetical 'two voices' revealed through Billy (Christian salvation) and Vere (Classical fate) explicates much of the ambiguity in the dualisms of Britten's earlier operas. The 'phenomenal pride', named by Melville, residing in the core of the operatic Vere and Claggart, enables a further reading of the dualistic theme 'Pride so hostile to our charity' emerging in Britten's aesthetic since Auden and *Fathers*:

Table 6: Oppositions in Britten's operatic aesthetic, from *Fathers* to *Budd*

Innocence	-	Corruption
Sacred	-	Profane
Charity	-	Pride
God	-	Devil
Goodness	-	Envy
Pacifism	-	Sadism
'Innocence' (surface)	-	'Guilty innocence' (deeper down)
Christian solutions (humility)	-	Classical solutions (worldly 'Glory')
Repentance	-	Repression

Having consecutively traced the 'guilty innocent' rejection of Christianity in his operatic dramaturgies up to *Budd*, Britten would now turn these themes, precisely, on their head, through the unique 'public' circumstances of the Coronation opera *Gloriana*.

Chapter 5: *GLORIANA*: spiritual antithesis

In composing *Gloriana* for the special public circumstances of the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, Britten produced an opera that radically reversed the spiritual trajectories of his previous (and late) operas. This situation may well have been produced by the reality of his subject and the resultant historical accountability that had not impinged upon the development of his previous, largely fictional, dramaturgies.

The Queen's successful conflation of the 'public and private' domain into the public, via her Divinely ordained 'marriage' to England, is a matter of historical record. Given the spiritual trajectory of his earlier operas, Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex (Robert Devereux) could become sufficient representatives of Britten's spiritual concerns, conceived in terms of Elizabeth's belief in her Divine mandate as Queen. This belief resulted in her repentance of the 'sin' embodied in the unrepentant Essex. The Queen's securing of perpetuity in this way represented a spiritual truth in relation to Christianity for Britten (cf. *Budd*). While possibly relevant to the Queen's and Essex's historical reality, Britten's interest in extending the narrative to 'other planes of significance' in this way conformed *Gloriana* to the field of spiritual tension so critical to his other operatic dramaturgies, 'for without the perspective thus created, Britten's music would never have been interested in the subject.'[1]

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[1] Britten (*BBC*) 1960 and Mitchell 1995:384

The Queen's explicit repentance – and that it is a woman that does so – is singular in Britten's *oeuvre*. Indeed Britten's music does not go beyond the act of her repentance: the Queen's Epilogue is mainly spoken. This could not be more completely contrasted with Aschenbach in *Venice*, whose public–private conflation into the entirely subjective private domain results in a spiritual 'Death', in Christian but not necessarily aesthetic terms, marked by an orchestral epilogue (i.e. no voice or text).

Although the *Gloriana* plot, with a convergence between the Queen and England through which Essex meets his death, may superficially be equated with *Budd*, the conclusions reached through Britten's music are profoundly different from those of Vere.

1. The 'Christianisation' of *Gloriana*: Strachey and Neale

The librettist, William Plomer, provided important insights into the balancing of the two main textual sources of the opera, Lytton Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex: A Tragic History* (1928) and J. E. Neale's biography *Queen Elizabeth* (1934), making it clear that 'both composer and librettist' became less interested than Strachey with history, chronology and amatory motives and more interested in the Queen, using Neale as primary source.[2] Plomer's reference to Neale as 'corrective' to Strachey accompanied his copy to Britten on 8 May 1952. Britten wrote back on 11 May, 'Neale's Q[ueen]. E[lizabeth].

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[2] Plomer (John 1983:99); Stein (*L*) 1953:949.

has arrived & I am deep in it, & enjoying it thoroughly'.[3] This interaction of Neale with Strachey is essential for present purposes in the way it redirects a traditionally cynical view of Elizabeth's relationship to religion for Britten's purposes.

Given Britten's 'Christianisation' of earlier dramaturgies, the religious *milieu* of the Elizabethan era cannot be simply taken for granted. Indeed, key moments for consideration here of the religious sphere of the operatic Elizabeth are not found in Strachey at all, notably the Queen's prayer at the end of I.2, the Norwich pageant (II.1), 'Lady Rich's Pleading' (III.3, 5), and the text in the Epilogue derived, in part, from the Queen's 'Golden Speech' to Parliament, all sourced in Neale.[4]

Britten's copies of Strachey and Neale have single annotations respectively:

> The youth loved hunting and all the sports of manhood; but he loved reading too. He could write correctly in Latin and beautifully in English; he might have been a scholar, had he not been so spirited a nobleman. As he grew up this double nature seemed to be reflected in his physical complexion. The blood flew through his veins in vigorous vitality; he ran and tilted with the sprightliest; and then suddenly health would ebb away from him, and the pale boy would lie for hours in his chamber, obscurely melancholy, with a Virgil in his hand.[5]

> Save for a fleeting crisis like that over Dudley, Elizabeth's mind was ever fixed on popular favour, at first as an art of government, and later as a profound emotional satisfaction.
>
> The opportunities of showing herself to the people were numerous, for the Court was constantly on the move. Greenwich, Whitehall, Richmond, Hampton Court, Windsor: there was not a year but the Queen could often be seen, like some very human and

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[3] Reed (Banks 1993:19). E.g. compare Strachey 1928/56:14 to Neale 1934/47:179, 252, 309.
[4] Plomer (John 1983:101). Also Neale 1934/47:68–71, 366–67, 383.
[5] Strachey 1928:4 (Britten–Pears Library).

> approachable goddess with her train, going by river or road from one of these palaces to another, or visiting other royal houses or private homes in the near neighbourhood of London. The City was afforded an annual autumn spectacle on the return to Whitehall, where Christmas was usually kept.[6]

These respective insights into Essex (Strachey) and Elizabeth (Neale) may be considered predictive of the public and private aspects of each character in the opera.[7] The transformation of Elizabeth into a monarch who experienced 'profound emotional satisfaction' from her 'Marriage to England' (I.2, 2). The Queen's Song) is important as it concerns the later period of her reign in which the relationship with Essex was conducted. The private depths revealed in Essex are important to the role of Britten's Second Lute Song – which effectively frames the relationship – and the spiritual depths that Elizabeth initially perceives there, explaining her attraction to him in the opera. The shift from Strachey to Neale is essential to these 'Christianisations'.

2. *Gloriana*: a spiritual sketch[8]

The complete legitimisation of the public sphere flows naturally from the Queen's recognition of the Divine claims of her role.[9] Regarding Essex, who has much musically in common with Grimes, Britten likewise counts on our sympathies with the doomed, selfishly proud anti-hero:

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[6] Neale 1934/47:205 (Britten–Pears Library).
[7] Mitchell (Palmer 1984:170–76).
[8] Stein 1953:949, a close friend of Britten's, provides an excellent operatic synopsis. For Plomer's overview, which must also have carried the composer's tacit approval, see John 1983:99–100. For a refutation of the view of Elizabeth as 'victim' of Essex's charms, see Neale 1934/47:329-30.
[9] Cf. I.2, 2; 8, Fig. 51 *et. seq.*; III.3, 7, Fig. 173[6].

> The Earl of Essex [role] is less daunting [than Elizabeth] since he is no surrogate of God but a mere man, vaulting in ambition, yet so confused as to aims that, having bungled his public duty, he betrays his private passion and traitorously threatens his Queen. [...] He cultivates his Renaissance wilfulness in defiance of reason, let alone truth. Yet if he is a victim of his moral insufficiency, he arouses [...] our admiration, as well as our dismay. There, but for the grace of God, might go we, for his fall is the Christian Fall writ large.[10]

The identification of Essex's victimization by his own 'moral insufficiency' and the universality of this in the Fall of Man is, precisely, the identification of the universal level of operations in *Gloriana* and Britten's earlier operas. Yet because of the respective natures and positions of the Queen and Essex and their relationship to law and grace in ways that transcend their personal relations, *Gloriana* yields a new and defining twist in the Britten operatic canon in its dramaturgical re-engagement with the nature of man in relation to sin and redemption in Christian terms.

3. The Double-Frame of *Gloriana*: Public and Private conflated

There are two frames in *Gloriana,* represented in what will be called the Crownèd Rose Theme (Elizabeth = 'public') and the Second Lute Song (Essex = 'private'). These aspects conform to those of the Queen and Essex Britten annotated in Neale and Strachey respectively. The *Gloriana* 'double-frame' represents an important development of Britten's earlier framing techniques, and is representative of the Queen's successful spiritual conflation of public and private fields.

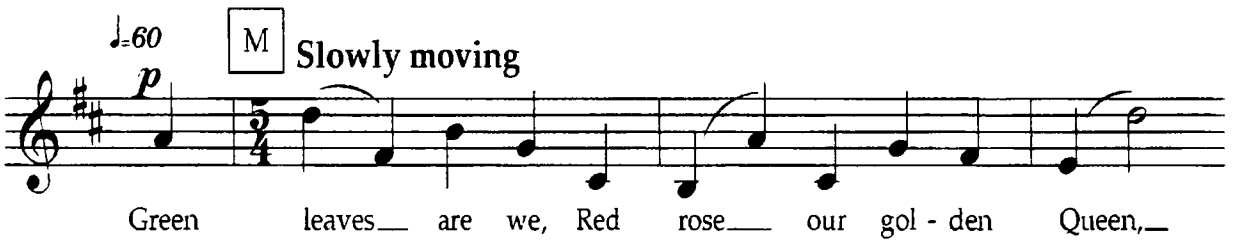
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[10] Mellers 1997:159.

a. The Crownèd Rose Theme and Favour Motive

The Crownèd Rose Theme, as well as framing the opera, unifies it. It celebrates the Queen's successful synthesis of public and private life, Neale's 'profound emotional satisfaction', in her dealings with her subjects. The open-handed music Britten gives to the interactions between the Queen and her subjects is indicative of this dynamic: that the Divinely mandated 'love affair' between the Queen and Country secured a Golden Age in English history. The similarity of type between Crownèd Rose and the well-known phrase 'And He shall reign for ever and ever' from Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus' (also in the key of D major and treated in imitative polyphony), where the reign of God is being extolled, is gesturally striking (Exs. 5, i, a–b):

Ex. 5, i, a. The Crownèd Rose Theme



Ex. 5, i, b. G. F. Handel, *The Messiah,* 'Hallelujah Chorus'



This echo effectively communicates Elizabeth's Divine prerogative, which is related to the Old Testament conception of the King of Israel as a national Messiah or Saviour on God's behalf. Such concepts are poignantly revealed in

the religious convictions expressed in the Queen's 'Soliloquy and Prayer'. (There is little direct concern in *Gloriana* with the issue of Church and State, given the occasion, rather than the universal aspect of personal faith.)

Britten subjects Crownèd Rose to processes of thematic transformation, yielding the greatest range of melodic content. His lyrical emphasis in relation to *Gloriana*'s 'looseness of build' was noted from the outset, contrasting the compact form of *Budd*.[11] The prodigality of Crownèd Rose and the expressive use to which Britten puts it anticipates Britten's thematic use of plainsong in the Church Parables. An example, with direct spiritual import, is Essex's distortion of the theme at '[The Queen's] conditions are as crooked as her carcass!' – a historically recorded comment by Essex from which the Queen never recovered ('Quartet', II.2, *10*, Fig. 99[4]). This distortion becomes the foundation of the string phrases introducing the Queen's appointment of Essex to Ireland, which will prove his ultimate undoing ('The Queen's Announcement' II.3, *12*). These phrases are themselves related to the 'anguished' string version of Crownèd Rose announcing the Queen's first arrival, to part the warring Essex and Mountjoy ('Entrance of the Queen', I.1, *4*). Such generation of multiple melodic forms and phrases from this theme (including its parody form in the Favour Motive) is germane to an opera whose very strength is its melodic impetus.

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[11] Stein (*L*) 1953:949.

The frame-like function of Crownèd Rose is anticipated in the orchestral bass at 'Prelude' (I.1, *1*, Fig. 1) and in the orchestral accompaniment to Mountjoy's victorious emergence onstage from the offstage joust:

Ex. 5, i, c. Orchestral embodiment of Crownèd Rose.



After the execution of Essex, Mountjoy became England's victor in Ireland over Tyrone. The opening musical connection between Mountjoy and the Queen is additionally significant in that Essex's hubristic argument with Mountjoy yields the Favour Motive:[12]

Ex. 5, ii. The Favour Motive



It has been observed that Favour is 'a drastic simplification of the [Crownèd Rose] curve, almost a reductive analysis of it'.[13]

The difference between the gracious manner of the Queen–Mountjoy Crownèd Rose and Essex's 'reductive' Favour, including the latter's inherent

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[12] Neale 1934/47:353, 'This arrogant young [Essex, was a] fit subject for the classical theme of hubris.'
[13] Evans 1993:83.

restless rhythmic structure in all its ensuing manifestations, conveys the difference between power bestowed by Divine Providence and power sought by the assertion of hubris.

Favour is subsequently transposed into the string interjections of the brass fanfares that introduce the Queen (I.1, *4*). Throughout this number Favour is varied in the strings against alternations of the B^{b}–B that will prove the semitonal crux of the 'Queen's Dilemma' in judging Essex at the *dénouement* (here heard as major–minor alternations against pedal G). Thus the musical processes illuminating Essex's treachery are initiated at the outset of the opera in a manner that parallels the semitonal friction between Peter and Ellen (*Grimes*) and Vere's B^{b}–b (*Budd*).

The tracing of Favour through Elizabeth's charge to Essex to bring her 'Victory and peace' in Ireland and the choral invocation 'Victor of Cadiz, overcome Tyrone' into the ominous orchestral statement that closes Act II is ironic given the fool given favour Essex will prove to be ('The Queen's Announcement' II.2, *12*, Fig. 101[8]; 'Ensemble', II.*13*, opening; and Essex's first Favour respectively). What is particularly striking about 'Victor of Cadiz' is the similarity of Favour to the Peter Motive of *Grimes* (compare Ex. 2, vi, c):

Ex. 5, iii. Conflation of 'Victor of Cadiz' version of Favour (II.3, *13*)



This connection is particularly appropriate dramaturgically as Essex's rejection of the Queen and embarkation upon his 'enterprise' (i.e. the promotion of his hubris in Ireland) counterpoints Peter's rejection of Ellen for his 'exercise' (i.e. the promotion of his hubris through capitalistic gain via his abuse of boy apprentices).

By the time Essex's sister, Lady Penelope Rich, embodies Favour in her pleadings for her brother's life ('The noble Earl of Essex'), it is so patently connected with the Earl's hubris that the mere hearing of it is a taunt to Elizabeth's ears, prompting her signing of the death warrant ('Lady Rich's Pleading', III.3, *6*).[14]

b. The Second Lute Song

Although framing the personal relationship between the Queen and Essex, the Second Lute Song, like Crownèd Rose, is impossible to detach from the public sphere. In its first appearance (I.2, *6*) Essex, nicknamed Robin, is only able to glimpse a world in which he rests from worldly ambition, a reconfiguration of Grimes' 'What harbour shelters peace':

> ESSEX
> Happy were he could finish forth his fate
> In some unhaunted desert, where, obscure
> From all society, from love and hate
> Of worldly folk, then might he sleep secure;
>
> Then wake again, and give God ever praise,
> Content with hips and haws and brambleberry;
> In contemplation spending all his days,

---

[14] Mitchell discerned that Penelope Rich's music is 'heard' by Elizabeth, i.e. that it is, on some level, a 'phenomenal' performance (Banks 1993:73).

> And chance of holy thoughts to make him merry:
> Where, when he dies, his tomb might be a bush
> Where harmless Robin dwells with gentle thrush.

The song is set to musical phrases, the first being a literal quotation of John Wilbye's madrigal 'Happy, O Happy He', that later mark the central crisis of the opera as Essex bursts in upon the unprotected Queen after his failure in Ireland and the operatic climax as Elizabeth signs Essex's death warrant (III. 1, 3, Fig. 125, 'Happy were *we*' and III. 3, 7 respectively).

The Second Lute Song is inevitably contrasted with the First Lute Song (I.2, 5, 'Quick music is best') incorporating the Queen's Cares of State Motive:

Ex. 5, iv. The Cares of State Motive (prime form)



This is essentially a decorated descending whole-tone scalic form of the tritone, a shape that will later be significant in its association with notions of war and peace in *War Requiem, Wingrave* and *Venice*. In *Gloriana* it is absorbed into larger scalic shapes, notably at Cecil's 'Madam, we are in the hands of God' (E–D–C–B^{b}, I.2, 4, Fig. $^{8}39$) the Queen's 'It is I who have to rule' ($G^{\#}$–$F^{\#}$–

E–D–C and $C^{\#}$–$A^{\#}$–$G^{\#}$–$F^{\#}$–E, III.1, *8*, Fig. 131[10] *et seq.*), and the latter end of the great ascending brass scale as the Queen signs Essex's death warrant and time and place recede (B^{b}–C–D–E–$F^{\#}$/G–A–B–$C^{\#}$, III.3, *7*, bar 7 *et seq.*). The latter brass scale is itself derived from Essex's line 'could finish forth his fate' in the Second Lute Song. The dramaturgical appropriateness of religious notions in Britten's manipulation of identifiable scalic forms in 'hymn rhythm' is gesturally consistent with earlier operatic usage.

The dramatic function of semitonal conflict against a pedal in the First Lute Song has been noted elsewhere in relation to Essex's revelation of his private self in the Second Lute Song, in which the pedal is dropped.[15] However Essex's explicit religious disclosure is an aspect that cannot be ignored in accounting for the song's success in fulfilling the Queen's request for a tune to 'Spirit us *both* away'.

Essex's historically authentic text discloses a dualism between 'society [...] love and hate of worldly folk' and a simple, wholehearted love of God. As we come to know the wise old Queen, especially through her prayer that closes Act I, we recognize that it is this concealed part of Essex's character that intrigues her. The presence of this quality apparently either takes her by surprise or causes curious probing:

> QUEEN
> Robin, a melting song: but who
> Can this unworldly hermit be?
>
> ESSEX
> It might be any man, not one you know.

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[15] Mitchell (Banks 1993:68–69).

QUEEN
'Tis a conceit, it is not you.

ESSEX [putting the lute aside]
Queen of my life, I cannot tell.

In the Epilogue, the only words of Essex's the Queen sings are 'In some unhaunted desert' and 'There might he sleep secure', indicating her knowledge that the song does indeed refer to Essex, the 'Robin'. (These lines frame Essex's final spoken words, off-stage, after the signing of his death warrant.) They provide her with consolation that, through death, she has released him from the vainglorious world that trapped him, i.e. like Peter Grimes, Essex's only hope of peace and rest are, in Balstrode's words, 'beyond life, beyond dissolution' (*Grimes*, III.1, Fig. 2 6). Although, to the modern secular mind, this might seem an unacceptable rationalization by the Queen, such religious sensibilities informed both the Monarch and the era over which she presided.[16]

However Essex's spiritual story, both operatically and historically (cf. the later chapters of Neale), can be seen to militate against the Queen's apparent hopes of Christian redemption. It is precisely the worldly side of Essex that ultimately undoes him:

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[16] Like the Israelites of the Old Covenant, the (unrepentant) enemies of the nation would be handed over to God for judgement via execution. The same might be argued for *Budd* save for Vere's unregenerate nature. The relatively oppressed and open style of *Budd* and *Gloriana* respectively are musical analogues of Vere's and the Queen's spiritual conditions.

ESSEX
On my own ground,
With my own voice,
To my own wife
I dare indict
Council and Queen,
And Heaven itself–
'Tis them I hate…

LADY ESSEX
No, my good lord,
You do blaspheme!
II.2, *4*. Quartet

Essex's sister Lady Rich, during an adulterous tryst with Mountjoy, provides key insights into the family's blind obsession with power:

MOUNTJOY
[You are] an angel wedded to a brute!

LADY RICH
But would an angel so deceive?
II.2, *1*, Prelude and Song, Fig. 70[11]

In these respects Essex mirrors Grimes and Vere, where their darker selves, drawn to worldly vainglory, fatally compromise any hope of a spiritual inner life from a Christian perspective. This new trajectory in *Gloriana* of the *Grimes* theme is central to its difference from the remaining operas, and a closer study of this relationship will now be undertaken.

4. Elizabeth, Essex and *Grimes*

Essex's subsequent turn to c minor in his taunting of Raleigh after the Second Lute Song (I.2, *7*, Fig. 47) exposes his dangerous ambition for power for which the song had in part acted as a 'conceit', as the Queen observed. Essex's outburst has been compared to the musical manner of Grimes' ambition,

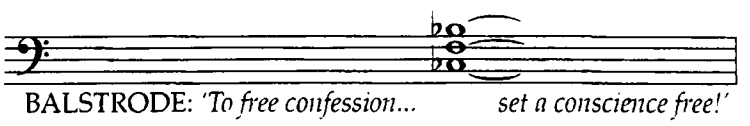
'These Borough gossips listen to money, only to money', for which his later 'Great Bear and Pleiades' aria may be seen to perform a similar 'conceit'-like function.[17]

This same music employs a musical phrase that acquires a number of texts: 'the lion will fall', 'he keepeth long his evil spite' and 'for God's sake let me go' (I.2, *7*, Fig. 47 *et seq.*). Britten uses an orchestral single, static 7th chord at the cadence point – not always employed with this Lion Motive elsewhere – that is virtually identical in construction and expressive power to the Storm Chord of *Grimes*.[18] In *Gloriana* the chord can logically be identified as a Pride Chord, being psychologically linked with Essex's hubris, as at its first appearing. Britten's gestural usage here is in keeping with the psychological implications of his use of the Storm Chord argued for in the chapter above, its presence signifying Peter's self-destructive vainglorious striving:

Ex. 5, v, a. Essex's 'The Lion will Fall' Motive with the Pride Chord (I.2, *7*)



Ex. 5, v, b. Example of the Storm Chord from *Grimes* (I.1, Fig. [2]44)



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[17] Kennedy 1981:191, who also connects Essex's music here with Quint's in the *Screw*.
[18] Evans 1979/96:192–23.

The downward scale fragment of Lion, an opening whole-tone segment framing a tritone concluded by a semitonal twist into the Pride Chord, is generated from the Queen's earlier Cares of State Motive (Ex. 5, iv).[19] Britten's later use of Lion and the Pride Chord is significant:

Table 7: Subsequent Lion Will Fall Motive and Pride Chord appearances

1. Essex's expressions of discontent during the Norwich progress ('Yawn myself to death', II.1, *1*, Fig. 58)

2. Penelope Rich's disclosure of her brother's ambition to Mountjoy ('He will mope or *storm* until the Queen hath let him go', II.2, *3*, Figs. 72–73)

3. The Queen's appointment of Essex to Ireland (II.3, *12*, Fig. 101 *et seq.*)

4. Essex's response to his appointment (II.3, *12*, Fig. 105 *et seq.*, the chord at Essex's reference to himself as 'a god' and 'with God's help' is strikingly ironic)

5. The scenes of Essex's return from Ireland and rude interruption of the Queen (III.1, *1*, bar 5 *et seq.* and *2*)

The *Grimes* Storm Chord is as much indicative of the sacrifice of Peter's love for Ellen on the altar of his worldly ambition as the Pride Chord is in *Gloriana* of Essex's sacrifice of the Queen on his – literally so if he had ever come to power:[20]

> [Essex's] love makes him feel good, makes his ambition feel noble, but when we are shocked at her signing his death warrant, we should not perhaps forget that he would have signed hers far more readily,

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[19] The 'twist' is itself related to the three conjunct semitones forming the *Grimes* Storm Theme (Ex. 2, ix, a).
[20] Neale 1934/47:371.

> readjusting his feelings flexibly: he would not have felt any need to say, 'I will not sign it now: I will consider it.'[21]

In this respect Essex's nature can be profitably compared with that of Grimes. Such connections may be considered particularly pointed in Britten's use of the key of e^{b} minor in both the *Grimes* Interlude II storm music and for the Queen's appointment of Essex. His words 'O put back the clock/ To the birth of our hope' during his final exchange with the Queen (III.1, *3*, Fig. 124) strongly recalls Grimes' 'Who can turn the skies back and begin again?' (I.2, Fig. ^{4}77) indicating a passive sentimentality that is not reflected by subsequent action.

The doleful presence of the Pride Chord at the Queen's 'It is I who have to rule' underpins both the her sad recognition of the need to repel Essex's unbroken pride (stated in her earlier words to Cecil in the number) and her poignant recognition of the necessary assertion of her Divinely ordained sovereign rights i.e. her 'other self' (III.1, *8*, seven bars before the end of the scene).

Britten's use of minor ninths for Essex's 'Whatever step I take/ The Queen will bar my way' (opening II.2, *3*) is a further *Grimes* connection, in particular the death of the first apprentice which thwarted Peter's love for Ellen, cf. the Love Duet 'Theme of Hope' unison and Peter's lament over the dead apprentice to Balstrode at the end of I.1.

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[21] Keller 1966/7:3–4.

As in *Grimes* III.1, the Courtly Dances of II.3 utilize popular dance forms to 'mask' the underlying intensity of the dramatic situation: Essex's design to upstage the Queen by publicly flaunting the beauty of his wife, Frances. The Queen's ire in d minor (*9*) grotesquely distorts the previous G major 'Lavolta' melody (*5*) in a manner reflecting the blood-curdling Borough distortion of the *alla Ländler* in *Grimes* (III.1, Figs. 13 *et seq.* and 41–42). The Queen's anger is surely aimed at Essex rather than the pacifist Frances who is so clearly, and cruelly, manipulated by Essex as a bauble of his hubris. The Queen is ultimately shown to be compassionate to Frances (III.3, *5*).

Britten's syntactical use of tonal references in *Gloriana* raises the issue of the role of the cycle of fifths so notable in the organization of the earlier operas. The Queen's authority, as related to the issues of the realm, emerges in the flat cycle $B^{\flat}$–$E^{\flat}$–$A^{\flat}$ of the Borough's 'social duty' in *Grimes* and of Vere's 'authority' in *Budd*, especially in the convergent relationship of Claggart's f minor and Vere's c minor.[22] There is logic to this: the Borough of *Grimes* is expanded to the Kingdom of England in *Gloriana*, although its function in the drama of *Gloriana* is more 'husband' than 'avenger'. Essex's c minor is the relative minor of $E^{\flat}$ and therefore stands in close proximity to the aspect of Sovereign the Queen embodies (cf. I.1, *4* and *9*).[23]

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[22] For key symbolism in *Gloriana* see Evans 1979/96:188–202; (*cd*) 1993:18–22; Banks 1993:77–93.

[23] In Britten's *Dream*, C major and c minor are used consistently for accord and disagreement between the lovers.

As in *Grimes*, F is the pivot towards the sharper realms of the fifth cycle (F–C–G–D–A–E–B–F$^{\#}$) that are now also connected to the Queen's Divine mandate (e.g. the D of Crownèd Rose). The Queen traverses the whole fifth cycle at various moments in the opera, musically demonstrating her to be Queen over private and public realms. In spite of the Queen's semitonal 'dilemma' over Essex (III), involving her own nature, the interaction between flat and sharp fields are ultimately shown to be congruent rather than opposed, unlike the semitonal friction of Vere's and Billy's in *Budd* and, subsequently, the Governess–Quint convergence in the *Screw*. Her Epilogue statement 'I have now obtained the victory over two things which the greatest princes cannot at their will subdue: the one is over fame, the other is over a great mind' is entirely justified by the music, both of the opera as a whole and the Epilogue itself: the Queen is removed from time and place and the c minor of the orchestral version of the 'Second Lute Song' turns to C (Fig. 173); G (174); E/a (175^{1}); b^{b} (176); c (179); F$^{\#}$ (180^{2}) and D for the concluding off-stage Crownèd Rose.

5. The Queen's Spirituality: Soliloquy and Prayer (I.2, *8*)

One of the earlier libretto typescripts (1-9200304) contains the following comments:[24]

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[24] Britten–Pears Library.

Soliloquy Queen *(with sadness and resignation)*
[soliloquising]

On rivalries 'tis safe for kings
To base their power: but how their spirit longs
For harmonies and mellowings
Of discords harsh, of real and phantom wrongs!

She paces slowly and emotionally up and down, wringing her hands and then putting them up to her face. Then with reverence
[thinking of Essex]

If life were love and love were true,
Then could I love thee through and through!

*Her mood changes: she grows meditative, and sings gently to herself: * Sudden (with resolution)
[with sudden resolution]

But God gave me a sceptre,
The burden and the glory–
I must not lay them down:
I live and reign a virgin,
Will die in honour,
Leave a refulgent crown!

In a rapt, exalted mood, *with her eyes raised to heaven, * she *approaches a prie dieu, * kneels, *raises her arms, writhes about, carried away by the strength of her conflicting feelings, * and prays aloud
[In a rapt, exalted mood, she kneels and prays aloud]

O God, my King, sole ruler of the world,
That pulled me from a prison to a palace
To be a sovereign Princess
And to rule the people of England:
Thou has placed me high, but my flesh is frail:
Without Thee my throne is unstable,
My kingdom tottering, my life uncertain:
O maintain in this weak woman the heart of a man!
Errors and faults have beset me from my youth,
I bow myself before the curtain of Thy grace:
Forgive and protect me, O God, my King,
That I may rule and protect my people in peace. *In peace.*
Amen. Amen.

Text between asterisks * * is crossed-out in pencil by Britten.
Text between square brackets [ ] indicates production notes in the final published libretto.

The greater degree of emotional control indicated in the published version reflects the greater degree of Apollonian discipline the aged Queen has over her emotions. Both her soliloquy and prayer are in the D of Crownèd Rose, and the soliloquy contains a clear transformation of the theme in the brass, connecting the number to the magnificent conception the Queen has of her position.

a. Soliloquy

Crownèd Rose undergoes an important transformation into darker shapes and sonorities in the Soliloquy that are connected to the Queen's exercising of her authority in judgement:

> The Soliloquy and Prayer which end Act I demonstrate, long before Essex understands it, how the divine charge of her office can never be neglected, even when it conflicts with the most ardent personal inclination. The Earl's vows are sorrowfully but firmly disowned, it is his theme that is inverted at 'If life were love and love were true', and its underlying thirds have become fourths, for [Crownèd Rose] repeatedly becomes upper-most in her thoughts.[25]

The identification of perfect fourths as indicative of 'moral imperative' echo through the music of Collatinus (*Lucretia*), Vere and Claggart (*Budd*), Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon (*Furnace*). This aspect of the Queen is first introduced in a Biblical reference to Solomon prior to her judgement of Mountjoy and Essex in a loose Crowned Rose shape emphasizing organum-like fourths (I.1, *8*, Fig. 4 22).

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[25] Evans 1979/96:195.

The new instrumental version of Crownèd Rose is heard on the trombones and, subsequently, trumpets (Fig. 51, 'But God gave me a sceptre'). Such treatment in brass sonorities suggests the steel within the Crownèd Rose that will be felt in judgement against the enemies of the crown:

Ex. vi. 'Judgement' form of Crownèd Rose



Judgement recurs on muted trombone in specific response to Essex (III.1, *3*, Fig. 125[15]). After the diverting beauties of *4* (The Table Dressing Song), it is reprised in the opening of *5*. This is followed by a reprise of Cares in *6*, indicating that Essex has become a 'care of state', arousing the punitive aspect of the Queen's authority, as had Cecil's reference to the Ambassador for Spain at the motives first appearing (I.2, *4*).

The subsequent dramatic reprise in *8* of the tournament fanfares that opened the opera, now in the context of the Queen's forcible restraint of Essex marks a change of tone in her dealings with her former favourite. Britten's modified gestural use the opening fanfares here indicates that she will win the joust with Essex sending a new champion, Mountjoy, into Ireland for victory, the very scenario symbolically presaged in the operas actual (unseen) opening tournament.

b. Prayer (and Pacifism)

Plomer has stated that the Queen's prayer 'is a conflation and adaptation of passages from prayers composed by the Queen in several languages'.[26] Plomer combines these authentic extracts into a number that clearly reveals the deep significance for the Queen of a personal relationship with God, going beyond a merely dutiful recognition of the Divine authority behind her throne. It has been noted elsewhere that both this situation and this specific music are rare in Britten's work.[27]

Failure to comprehend Britten's Elizabeth's genuine Christian sensibility risks failure in understanding her profound difference from the Vere and Governess in *Budd* and the *Screw* respectively, despite superficial similarities of plot in the three consecutive operas. On the other hand, adequate comprehension will enable connections between the Queen and Ellen Orford – a point amplified by Joan Cross' creation of both roles.

What the 'Soliloquy and Prayer' additionally demonstrate is Elizabeth's essentially pacifist nature in keeping with earlier observations of Ellen Orford in *Grimes*. This was surely an aspect of the Queen of deep significance to Britten.[28] The C major of the Queen's 'Ensemble of Reconciliation' (I.1, *8*), in which she brings a dangerous peace between Essex and Mountjoy, attests to her ultimate desire for unity in all things, eloquently expressed in her Soliloquy. In addition to her prayer, Elizabeth's essentially

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[26] John 1983:101.
[27] White 1970/83:200; Evans 1979/96:195; Whittall 1982/90:146; Holloway 1994:41.
[28] Neale 1934/47:333. See also Cooke 1996:101, fn. 7 for observations on Strachey's pacifism.

pacifist nature is underlined against the war-like spirit of Essex (I.1, *8*, Figs. 22 and 26; I.2, *4*, Fig. 38[5]; II.2, *12*, Figs. 101[6] and 103[5] and [2]106; III.2, 'Ballad–Rondo', verses IV and V).

Essex's hubris is evident in the opening scene where he baldly asserts 'Mine the task to break [Mountjoy's] pride!' Yet the opera reveals that it is he who is unable to find humility, he whose dangerous pride must be broken. In contrast Cuffe describes Mountjoy after the opening tournament, 'Now he makes his humble duty/ Before the Queen in strength and beauty' (I.1, 2, Fig. 12). The subsequent fight Essex launches on Mountjoy is therefore predictive of that with the Queen, prepared musically by Mountjoy's first appearance onstage to Crownèd Rose strains (Fig. 13 *et seq.*).

It is clear that unbroken Pride and War are ideologically connected here and, once again, the Britten theme of 'Pride so hostile to our Charity' is placed at the centre of his opera as a projection of these concerns (cf. I.2, *7*, Fig. [4]5 and 46; II.2, *4*, Fig. 78; III.2, *7*, Fig. 131). Indeed the Earl's 'illicit' war-like qualities against the background of the Queen's pacifism might be connected to a potential, illicit, erotic threat he might represent, certainly an aspect emphasized throughout Strachey's Freudian reading of the relationship.[29]

The final exchanges between the Queen and Essex's sister, Lady Penelope Rich, bring this conflict to a head in a brilliantly conceived scene (III.3, *5*). The Queen hears a manifestation of Essex's hubris in her own soprano voice, only now that of an adulterous woman. Penelope's assault on

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[29] Strachey 1928/56 and Holroyd (John 1983:75–81).

the Queen prompts the signing of Essex's death warrant, and Penelope's scream in a descending portamento from high C mirrors that of the death of John, Peter's otherwise silent apprentice in *Grimes* (II.2, Fig. [1]70). While John's death symbolized the death of Peter's soul, Elizabeth's execution of the verbally precocious adult Essex symbolizes the death of a 'weak' part of herself – a Dionysian 'violent indulgencie' that threatens 'non-perpetuity'.[30]

Her self-sacrifice in this sense enables Elizabeth to reach full spiritual maturity as adumbrated in her Epilogue, even though she is aware of the tragedy for them both in human terms. The Queen's resultant spiritual 'glory' – literally 'Gloriana' – will be fundamentally questioned by Britten in *Wingrave* via an attack on the idea of 'glory' itself. Aschenbach's lethal Dionysian 'indulgency' in *Venice*, ending his 'perpertuity', forms the spiritual antithesis of the coronation opera.

6. Norwich (II.1): The Marriage of Queen and Country

The essence of the Norwich scene demonstrates, unequivocally, the reciprocal love that England has for its Queen. Elizabeth's rule was not merely a legalistic fulfilment of duty and a desperate attempt to hold on to power, but as Neale observes in the passage annotated by Britten, a 'profound emotional satisfaction'. The Guildhall bells that frame the scene distantly recall the bell scene of *Grimes* (II.1), only now celebrating the marriage between Queen and

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[30] Naunton cited Plomer (John 1983:99).

Country which will provoke Essex both to envy and impatience for promotion to Ireland.[31] The scene is cast in C major.

The choral dances are important, not only in sealing this love, but also in relation to the *Venice* choral dances.[32] Each respective scene has essentially the same function in that it illumines a 'timeless' truth for the Queen and Aschenbach (for the latter his self-destructive love of Tadzio), which lies outside the chronology of the dramatic narrative in both operas. Both scenes display to the audience, in ritualised form, a moment in which a particular kind of beauty is being contemplated by the protagonist. This act of contemplation provides the crux of the protagonist's 'dilemma'.

In the case of *Gloriana*, the masque that makes up the scene enables us to comprehend why the idealized beauty and love of England was enough to inspire Elizabeth to make the personal sacrifices she did: the overt, lover-like convergence between Queen and People, against which Essex obliges himself to jealously contend.

This Britten achieves by writing a sequence of choral dances whose power to move through the simplest of means is astonishing. Yet the Queen's own response is designed by Britten to remove any possible doubt of the depth to which she responds to the love of her people. This is achieved by the sudden shift from *a cappella* C to full orchestral $F^{\#}$ (*ppp*, II.1, 3). The Queen's subsequent progress through the 'awed stillness' of the concordant triads

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[31] John Piper's original designs for this scene were 'in white and gold, the colours of marriage' (Basil Coleman, interview, Dec. 2002).
[32] Mitchell (Palmer 1984:239–40); Evans 1979/96:542.

(a favourite kind of Britten pun – 'Time and Concord' being the subject of the masque itself) of A, B^{b} returning to C illumines her deeply felt response.[33] The deep pacifist feelings in the music come from Britten, and his use of radiant triads in the context of love are as telling as ever. Lady Rich's later lethal assertions in $F^{\#}$ on her brother's behalf, lethally encroaches on this 'sacred bond' (III.3, *6*).

7. The Queen's Dilemma

There is an important connection between the semitonal implications of the pedal in the First Lute Song and the $B^{b}/A^{\#}$–B instability of 'The Queen's Dilemma', the latter being a single span of drama in III.3, from numbers *4–6*, although the semitonal friction also extends to the beginning of the scene.[34] The B^{b} of the Counsellors' judgement of Essex is the same key of the self-condemnation of Grimes and Vere in Christian terms (II.1 and *Budd* Epilogue respectively). Indeed the $B^{b}/A^{\#}$–B/C^{b} semitonal dilemma of the Queen is the paradigmatic tension of *Budd* (i.e. B^{b}–b). It is also notable that Britten sets Essex's condemnation in e^{b} (Fig. 155^{3}), the key of his appointment to Ireland. This is the key of Interlude II (*Grimes*) in which Peter psychologically rejects Ellen, the wellspring of his salvation.

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[33] Evans 1979/96:195; Holloway 1994:40. The C–F# connection between Queen and Country may touch upon the C–F# tritone that dominates the music of *War Requiem*.
[34] Mitchell (Banks 1993:71).

The Queen is initially able to avoid this deadly e^{b} via the G major of her entry (Fig. 156, pointing up the B^{b}–B tension in another way, related to her opening music, I.1, *4*), until the emergent e^{b} of her 'other self' (after Fig. 160):

> QUEEN
> I grieve, yet dare not show my discontent;
> I love, and yet am forced to seem to hate;
> I am, and am not;
> Freeze, and yet I burn.
> Since from myself my other self I turn.

Britten's alternation of sharp and flat fields in this music reflects the (sharp) fluctuations of Crownèd Rose and the (flat) exercise of authority respectively in relation to the cycle of fifths.

The Queen's exercise of authority is profoundly different from the 'dilemma-less' Vere's in *Budd*, despite a superficial apparent similarity:

> [The] 'dilemma' Vere was unable to have – and which Britten might have wished he could have had – came to be composed, finally, in *Gloriana*, where the Queen is able to give vent to her indecision on a scale and in a spirit denied Vere. There was never a possibility of reprieve for Billy: but for Essex, yes, there is, until that fateful last B^{b} [prompted by Penelope] strikes home.[35]

The Queen's actions are justified, not only because she ultimately operates entirely within the law, unlike Vere, but also because she is reluctant to proceed with the execution until she is convinced by irrefutable evidence of Essex's unrepentant pride: 'Elizabeth still wanted the way open for a

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[35] *Ibid.*:74.

reformed Essex to return to her service.'[36] This may be seen to have retroactive ramifications for the crisis scene of *Grimes* where the 'treason of the waves' Ellen feels from Peter after the discovery of the bruise on John's neck becomes actual treason in *Gloriana*.

8. Epilogue: The Queen leaves the world of aesthetics

At the moment Elizabeth signs the death warrant, symbolic of the triumph of Apollonian discipline over Dionysian passion, she is literally and aurally transported out of the world of art represented by the very operatic medium in which she has previously existed. In the overall context of Britten's operas, this is a clarifying moment.

When Balstrode 'sentences' Peter to death at sea in the *dénouement* of *Grimes* – a kind of assisted suicide – Balstrode leaves the world of song and musical aesthetics and enters into 'reality' by literally speaking his final instructions to Peter.[37] The reprise in *Grimes* of the framing music of Interlude I at the conclusion is echoed by the framing function of the Second Lute Song in *Gloriana*. Both examples come from love music between the respective protagonists, Peter–Ellen and Elizabeth–Essex. This would indicate that *Gloriana* is a commentary on *Grimes* on some level in which Peter's betrayal of Ellen is revealed more clearly, and the righteousness of Ellen's cause upheld. This would have been very clear in the original *Gloriana* production, where

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[36] Neale 1934/47:367.

[37] Britten does not use *sprechgesang* for individuals in either *Grimes* or *Gloriana*.

Pears (creator of Grimes) created Essex, and Joan Cross (creator of Ellen) created the Queen.

However, the fact that the Queen's speeches are accompanied is quite different from Balstrode's naked, unaccompanied speech. Rather it is redolent of Paul Bunyan's accompanied monologues in the earlier operetta. Indeed, as Bunyan himself is a kind of benevolent demi-god, and his accompanied monologues are often the presentation of his timeless dreams, the connections between this aspect of *Bunyan* and the *Gloriana* Epilogue are strengthened. The only moments in the Epilogue where Elizabeth breaks back into song are when reflecting on the fate of Essex and the moment of her own death. Britten's music is not able to follow the Queen after her repentance of Essex even though the closing off-stage Crownèd Rose confirms that Elizabeth will be in heaven with God 'for ever' (cf. the Handel 'Halleluiah Chorus' background of the theme).[38]

That *Gloriana* inverts the situation in *Budd* – a godless man who sends a Christian boy to his death/a godly woman who sends an ungodly man to his – prepares us for the complex spiritual situation in the *Screw* in which a godly woman becomes corrupt, leading to the spiritual deliverance of a child from evil, but at the cost of his life and her soul.

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[38] Britten immediately followed *Gloriana* with the deeply pessimistic and nihilistic Hardy cycle *Winter Words*, to be performed by Pears and himself.

Chapter 6: *The Turn of the Screw*: catastrophic knowledge

'[The Turn of the Screw] was certainly a difficult work to bring off technically and spiritually.' [1]

Whatever the truth of the claim that Britten 'closed in on himself' after the official debacle of the *Gloriana* premiere, the impact of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* had been felt by Britten as early as age 19.[2] Certainly the evaluation of the opera Britten cited as 'ideologically [...] dark and pessimistic and so on' is anticipated in *Peter Grimes* and prophetic of *Owen Wingrave* and *Death in Venice*, the last operas also sharing Myfanwy Piper as librettist with the *Screw*.[3] Many consider it Britten's most characteristic opera.[4]

In light of Britten's previous 'Christianisation' of his literary sources and his subsequent composition of Canticle III and *Noye's Fludde*, the surface appearance of total occultism in the *Screw* should not be taken at face value, even though James' chilling tale may not seem obviously ripe for any kind of treatment from a Christianised perspective.

The initial reaction to the *Screw* as an unequivocal battle between good and evil, and why Britten may not have wished to openly contradict such a reading, has been investigated elsewhere.[5] However a reading of Britten's version of James' story as a battle between two manifestations of evil from

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[1] Britten (cited Carpenter 1992:361).
[2] Mitchell 1994:13.
[3] Britten 1964:273.
[4] E.g. Berkeley and Tippett (Blyth 1981:44 and 69).
[5] Mitchell 1994:10.

which the boy Miles is forced to choose can be legitimately discerned. The moral dilemma posed by this double-manifestation of evil is realized in the opera through a symbiotic Governess–Quint relationship, crystallizing the kind of convergences in the earlier operas to a degree.[6]

The Vere and Claggart convergence in *Budd* is amplified in that, whereas the Governess is apparently able to save Miles' soul by getting him to renounce the evil represented by Quint, it is at the cost of Miles' physical life.[7] The Hymn and Litany (*Bunyan*), Ellen Orford (*Grimes*), Collatinus (*Lucretia*), Billy (*Budd*), and the Queen (*Gloriana*) all represent more or less viable modes of redemption in their respective contexts. In the world of Britten's *Screw*, neither the Church (II.2) nor the housekeeper at Bly, Mrs. Grose, the only modes related to Christian salvation beyond the Governess herself, are able to prevent the spread of corruption. Britten's Billy Budd and Miles complete a regenerating cycle of innocence–fall–repentance–salvation (greatly expanded from Melville and James respectively, and 'death-bed' salvations at that), which is not allowed to Vere and the Governess (i.e. their respective histories conclude at their Fall, in line with Grimes and Lucretia, although they don't die physically).

The reading of the *Screw* as an account of the Governess' fall from a kind of nescient innocence (which, in James, stems from her being a country

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[6] *Ibid.*:10–13 and Rupprecht 2001:177–79.
[7] Evans 1979/96:219.

Parson's daughter) into a passion of self-serving 'phenomenal pride' has a strong history in James criticism, mostly written after the opera's premiere.[8]

1. The development of *The Turn of the Screw* 'away' from Henry James

Given the traditional vexed problem of the 'two story' theory surrounding criticism of James' tale, the single most important transformation from book to opera is Britten's making the ghosts real, as Britten himself disclosed.[9] Subsequent scholarship affirms this.[10] Britten's musical insistence on this reality – a logical outcome of the need for the ghosts to be sung roles producing a great dramatic clarification – troubled Piper: 'The ghosts remained (and remain) my greatest worry.'[11]

In making the ghosts real Britten accentuated the reality of the corruption of the children, and the need for them to be saved from such a state, a salvation annotated directly by Britten in his copy of James:

> The children in especial I should then fence about and absolutely save.
> [...]
> 'I don't do it!' I sobbed in despair; 'I don't save or shield them! It's far worse than I dreamed. They're lost!'[12]

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[8] Heilman 1967:200–11; Firebaugh (Willen 1969:291–97); Krook 1962:106–34, and 370–89. It might be felt that the similarity of the Governess' chorale theme (I.II, Fig. 10 to I.III, Fig. 15) to the first phrase of the hymn-tune 'St Anne' ('O God, our help in ages past', Hymn 450, *The English Hymnal* 1965:52) might ironically comment on the Governess' Christian background, especially as Britten marked out this particular hymn as a childhood favourite (see Table 2).

[9] Harewood 1981:139. The 'two story' theory of James' tale is essentially:

1. The ghosts are real and so is the corruption.
2. The ghosts and corruption are a product of the Governess' neuroses.

See Jones (Howard 1985:1–22).

[10] Mitchell 1994:9; Evans 1979/96:205; Hindley (*MQ*) 1990:1–2.

[11] Herbert 1979/89:11.

[12] James 1947:48 and 61 respectively (Britten–Pears Library).

Britten's annotations indicate his central attraction to the spiritual aspect of James' tale, 'lost and saved' obviously viewed as Christian concept in the Governess' *milieu*, in line with his earlier operas:

> He would never have set a cruel subject to music without linking the cruelty to the hope of redemption.[13]

It has been discerned that the sin personified by the ghosts in relation to the children is pederasty, although this may be universalised as any self-knowledge of sin contributing to a spiritual Fall.[14] This may well indicate, in Freudian terms, a repressed libido behind the Governess' motivations symbolized in Quint.[15] Such a proposal is well supported in James criticism and was certainly part of the reception culture of Britten's era, and is demonstrable in Britten's gestural use of 'loving' triads to accompany the Governess' writing of the letter to the Guardian (II.III, Fig. 67).[16] Such Freudian interpolations finally undo the Governess' otherwise pure desire to save Miles.[17]

Britten designed the opera as a series of sixteen scenes. At the end of the Prologue, Britten introduces an instrumental *Screw* Theme, which

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[13] Holst 1966:40.

[14] 'In fact [the Screw] is vague only in one thing; in what, if anything, actually happened between the children and the haunting pair', Piper (Gishford1964:79). 'Despite reservations natural to his temperament and times, James was more explicit in *The Turn of the Screw* than many people were prepared to allow' (White 1970/83:202). Also Carpenter 1992:335–41; Palmer (Howard 1985:101–25); Hindley (*MQ*) 1990:1–17.

[15] White 1970/83:203–204.

[16] Heilman 1947; Tompkins 1970:60–79; also Howard 1985:1–22, 136–37. The triadic sequence is G–A–C–D–B^{b}–E^{b}–A–f–e^{b}. See *Budd* chapter for discussion of 'triads=love' in Britten.

[17] E.g. Heilman 1947. Britten seriously considered the Freudian title *The Tower and the Lake* at one stage (Britten 1977:8). For affirmative views of Britten's musical sub-stratum of guilt the Governess feels in her love for Miles via her primary love for the children's Guardian see Howard 1969:131 *et seq.* and Evans 1979/96:215. For a discussion of ramifications of the psychosexual element in the *Screw*, see Rupprecht 2001:177–79.

becomes the basis of fifteen orchestral variations preceding the respective scenes.[18] This Theme and variations are contrasted with a dramatic Catalyst Theme used in the scenes to illumine the Governess–Quint symbiosis. It is the dramaturgical significance of these two themes to which we now turn.

2. Britten's *Screw* Theme: spiritual (self–centred) asphyxiation

Britten's *Screw* Theme, like the *Lucretia* Melodic Theme, occurs four times. These statements effectively frame the two acts. The Prologue and Finale appearances (the latter as a passacaglia ground) are 'in A' (cf. Interlude I reprised as the closing music of *Grimes*), effectively framing the work according to Britten's custom.

This Theme is constructed from the twelve notes of the chromatic scale, and it has become a more-or-less common practice to identify Britten's thematic use of such material as twelve-note 'propositions'.[19] This distinguishes Britten's use of the technique from the stringent methodologies of serial orthodoxy in which he had little interest. Britten's approach is tonal and reflects the relative freedom of Bergian twelve-note practice. This is illustrated in the Theme by two hexachords 'in' A and E^{b} respectively, the primary *Grimes* tritone and that of Claggart's aria in *Budd*, I.3. Indeed, as a projection of Vere's recall of events, the twelve-note accumulated aggregate in

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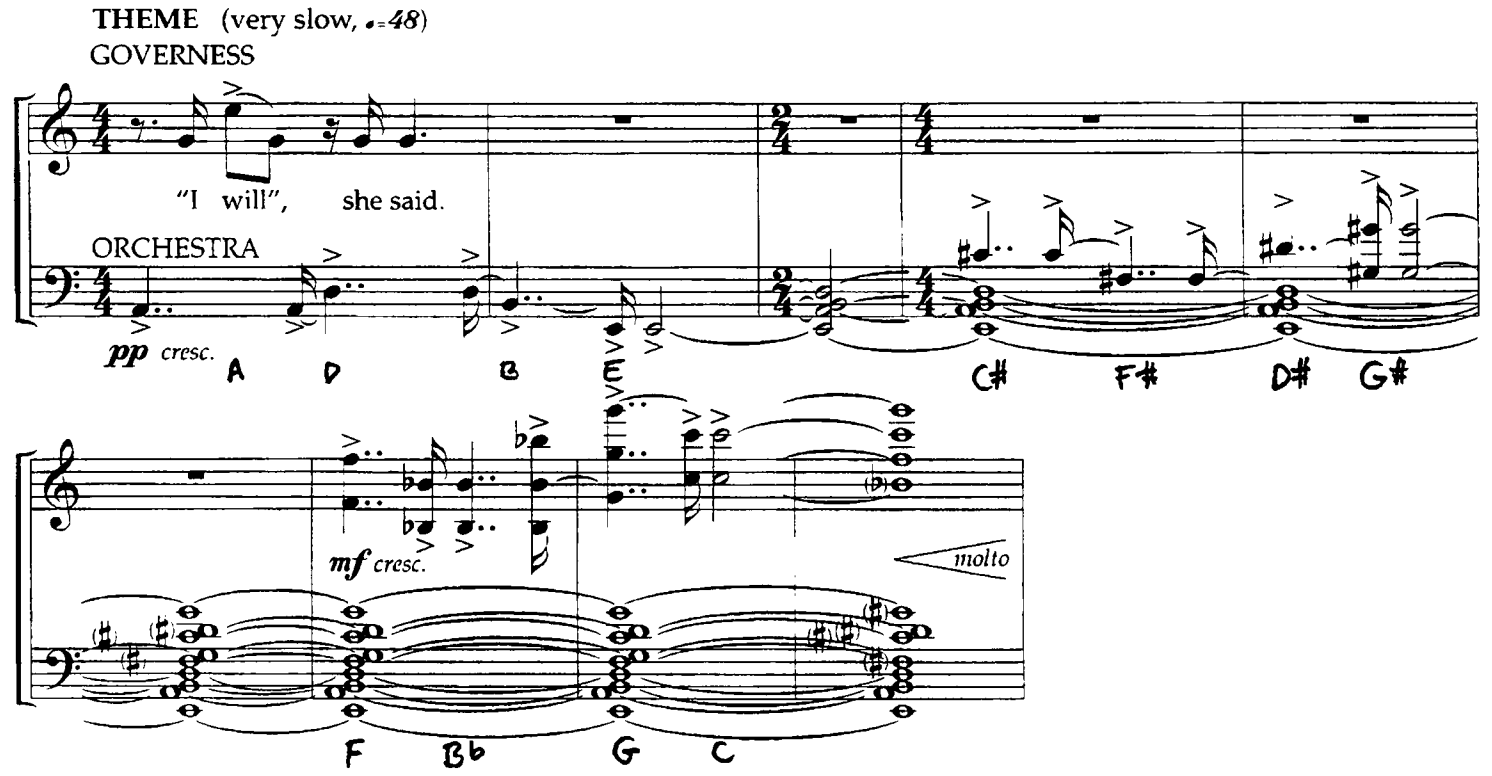
[18] These variations serve the purpose of introducing the pitch that will be the centre of the ensuing scene: Act I: A (Theme), B (I), C (II), D (III), E (IV), F (V), G (VI), A^{b} (VII), Act II: A^{b} (VIII), $F^{\#}$ (IX), F (X), E^{b} (XI), $C^{\#}$ (XII), C (XIII), B^{b} (XIV), 12 notes (XV), (A^{b})/A (Finale).
[19] See J. Evans (Mitchell 1987:99–114) and Evans 1979/96:526.

the battle scene (*Budd*, II.1, Fig. 31), linked with the *Indomitable* 'will to war', is thwarted by an impotent canon shot and the immediate return of the mist representing Vere's moral confusion before Claggart (Figs. 34 and 50 *et seq.*, the latter being a 'Mist Interlude').

This underlying (Freudian) aspect of the thwarted *Budd* battle can be inferred in the *Screw* Theme against contexts of libidinous repression in Britten's later use of twelve-note propositions, most notably in the *Dream*, *Wingrave* and *Venice*.[20] As with Vere, the events are recalled by the Governess through the device of a Prologue narration (Pears created the Prologue and Quint roles):

> PROLOGUE
> It is a curious story. I have it written in faded ink–
> a woman's hand, governess to two children – long ago'.

Ex. 6, i, a. The Screw Theme (showing twelve-note aggregate)



[20] '[Twelve note propositions] often represent sterility, corruption or the supernatural in BB, which may be why Oberon's spells in *Dream* are similar; this is of course related to chromatic = corrupt and diatonic = innocent, which comes to a head in the *Screw*. [...] Certainly it is odd that twelve-note propositions seem to represent both the bad and the good, generally positive when used to generate roots for triadic progressions, but negative when leading to chromatic saturation (e.g. Oberon).' (Mervyn Cooke, correspondence with author, Dec. 2002)

Ex. 6, i, b. The *Budd* battle twelve-note aggregate (II.1)



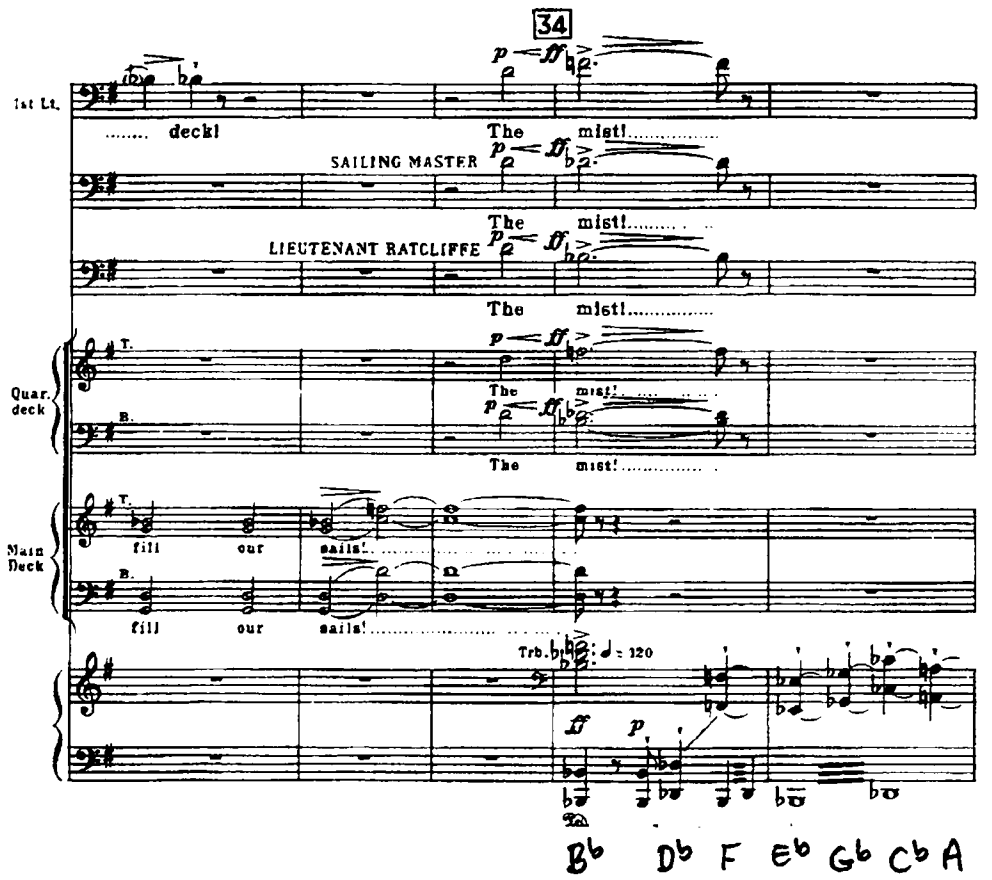
F C♯ E G♯ F♯ A D C E♭ B♭ G

Continued over

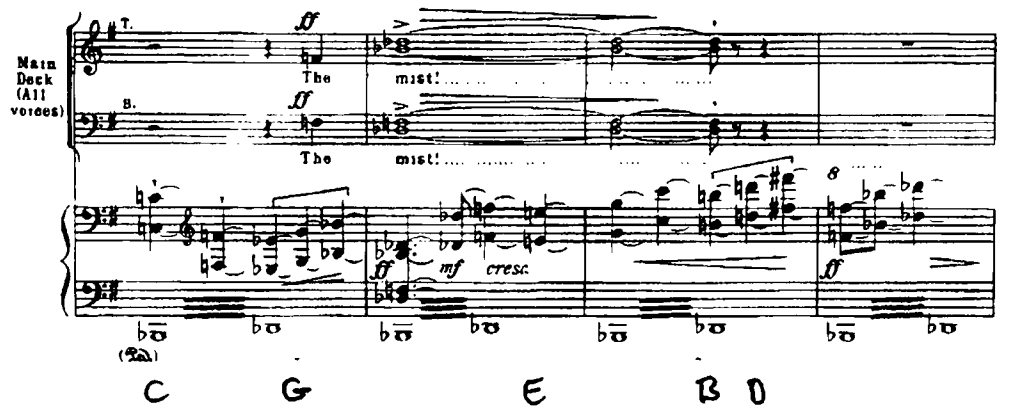
(The opening F is considered part of the proposition in the same way that the concluding D of Owen's Theme is in the opening proposition of *Wingrave*.)



Ex. 6, i, c. The 'mist' of Vere's moral confusion



Continued over



It has been noted elsewhere that Britten must have been aware of the musical transcription of the name 'Quint' into the intervals of the fifth and its inversion as fourths in the *Screw* Theme.[21] The natural-sharp-flat progression through the cycle of fifths, suggestive in the *Screw*'s symbolic language for the corruption of innocence and goodness by sin and evil, is a near-perfect musical analogue: the metaphysical interactions in the field of singular human operations in the earlier operas is now reconfigured to suggest an increasing spiritual constriction.[22]

The Governess herself is corrupted by Quint. This is especially clear in the A^{b}–A finale 'dilemma' (i.e. Quint in the Governess cf. the ($A^{\#}$/) B^{b}–b of the Vere–Claggart and Elizabeth–England convergences in the *dénouements* of *Budd* and *Gloriana*). Britten himself commented to Piper that 'I have a sneaking horrid feeling that the original H[enry]. J[ames]. title describes the musical plan of the work exactly!!'[23] This could not be better compared with the 'tight' (primarily motivic) musical construction of the spiritual defeat of

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[21] Palmer (Howard 1985:110). The *Screw* Theme, in its arrangement of a cycle of falling fifths moving in thirds, has a precedent in *Gloriana* (III.1, 7), in which the discussion between the Queen and Cecil 'turns the screw' on Essex's doom.

[22] 'Both [*Budd* and the *Screw*] perhaps reproach too much care and consciousness in dealing with elemental and supernatural crises' (Garvie 1970:63).

[23] Britten (cited Herbert 1979/89:10).

Vere in *Budd* and contrasted to the loose-timbered (primarily melodic) construction depicting the spiritual triumph of the Queen in *Gloriana*.

The identification of the supernatural world with flat pitches and keys is important throughout the *Screw*, e.g. in 'The Lake', I.VII, where E^{b} is unequivocally associated with the 'Dead Sea' from which Miss Jessel appears and, via the Catalyst Theme in that scene, the Governess' failure to 'save or shield' the children.[24] Arguably, the most telling example of such slides between sharp and flat regions is that from the church scene $F^{\#}$ to the 'cold' F at the Governess' realization that she is finally 'Alone, alone, alone' ('The Bells', II.II, Fig. 55). This kind of manifestation of corruption-through-semitonal-flattening (cf. the motto of *Fathers*, Ex. 1.i) has clear precedent in Britten's earlier operas (e.g. *Grimes*, II.2).

Britten's statement 'You could say that people are my note rows' would locate the symbolism of his twelve-note propositions unequivocally in the universal domain of the human 'will' – however else one chooses to interpret such a statement.[25] It may be thought that the determining of 'fate' in combination with the result of considered actions in Britten's earlier dramaturgical operations is the concept that lies behind the musical construction of Britten's *Screw* Theme (i.e. that 'fate' results from human

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[24] White 1970/83:209.

[25] Britten (Blyth 1970:29). 'The discipline inherent in twelve-note music, therefore, comes to stand as a sign – the index and icon – of moral will', Lidov (Steiner 1981:199); also Corse 1987:115. The influence of Schopenhauer might lie behind such connections.

'will', even when negative or passive). However, in the *Screw*, the devastating consequence of a singularly evolving will power is clarified as an 'all':

> [Britten regards his twelve note propositions as ramifications of tonal hierarchies.] What he sees in a note-row is not so much equality but *totality*: almost every one of his twelve-note ideas is in some sense the symbol of an *all* – a cosmos, one might more pompously say.[26]

Britten's symbolic use of the twelve-note Theme would, therefore, be suggestive of the 'totalitarianism' – the 'all' or 'cosmos' – of a single will, that of the Governess–Quint. Those 'looser' moments in *Gloriana* where quasi-twelve-tone forms might be connected with the Queen–England convergence is additionally interesting in these respects.[27]

At the end of the Prologue, on page five of Britten's composition sketch, the Governess' quasi-marital vow directed at the children's handsome but absent Guardian, the words (without music) '"I will", she said', are written under the *Screw* Theme. In the finished opera, at the Governess' pledge of her will to the Guardian, the Theme commences in the orchestra, heard for the first time (i.e. the orchestral sonorities are also generated by and associated with the *Screw* Theme), the Prologue being accompanied by the solo piano. The Theme proceeds from her mental assent (i.e. the redirection of her will) and the libidinous repression it symbolizes. Once again we find the issue of repression versus repentance at the heart of Britten's aesthetic dialectic and

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[26] Evans 1979/96:206.

[27] *Gloriana*: I.2,4, where the Queen's string figure, later echoed in her appointment of Essex to Ireland, uses 11 notes, leaving the F in the trumpet fanfares; III.1, 1, where the trombone/cello figure leaves the $G^{\#}$ to the second phrase (bar 6, cf. Ex. 6, I, c also); III.1,3, where the twelve minor chords on twelve roots, $e–g^{\#}–b^{\flat}–a–d–e^{\flat}–d^{\#}–f^{\#}–b–f–c^{\#}$ to Fig. 118, delay the return of the Second Lute Song c minor triad at Fig. 124.

the concomitant 'guilty innocence' that has been discerned in Britten's dramatic aesthetic.

The strongest direct connection between the Theme and the Governess' will is at the end of the *Screw*, where she is pressuring Miles, accompanied by the Theme in A major (Figs. 131–34):

> GOVERNESS
> Who made you take the letter? Who? Who?
> Who do you wait for, watch for?
> Only say the name, only say the name
> And he will go for ever, for ever, ever.[28]

Against this Quint sings snatches from his seduction song (I.VIII, Fig. 83), in A^{b} major:

> QUINT
> On the paths, in the woods, remember Quint!
> At the window, on the tower, when the candle is out,
> remember Quint!
> He leads, he watches, he waits!

At this point Quint's words, sung simultaneously with the Governess', apply to her as much as to him as she has similarly been in all of the locations Quint describes, including the important candle reference. This section of the finale was crucially revised by Britten, and Mitchell has discussed this, directly connecting the *Screw* Theme with 'Quint and Miss Jessel, the powers of darkness in the opera'.[29] Britten's relocation of the Theme in the revision, doubled by the Governess at her demands for Miles' confession (above), underline the symbolic significance of the ghosts, beyond any question of

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[28] According to the Christian paradigm stealing is as much a sin as sexual immorality (cf. James 2:8).
[29] Mitchell 1995:397–406 (quotation on 400).

their reality, in the corruption of the purity of the Governess' will in saving the children. Quint's A^{b} continues to infuse the Governess' 'victorious' A major in the operas closing moments, after Quint himself has been banished (cf. Claggart's f minor traced in Vere's closing vocal line).

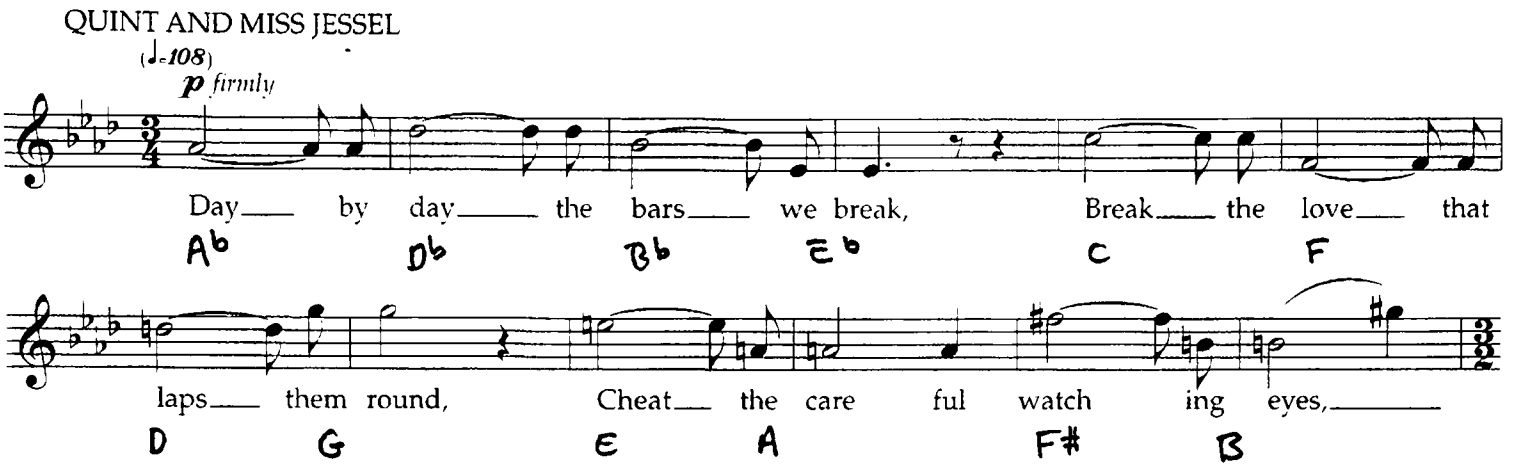
The connection of 'will' with twelve-note propositions recurs in the Storm passacaglia – God's will – of *Noye' Fludde* (a ground strikingly similar to the *Screw* Theme); wilful (Fairy) magic in the *Dream;* the war-like will of Wingrave military tradition (*Wingrave*); and the self-disciplined will of Aschenbach (*Venice*). These situations, where the twelve-note propositions are shown to have repressed libidinous significations in a majority of cases, and are often connected to orientally derived musical techniques that dramaturgically bring about either healing (*Noye* and the *Dream*, not forgetting the Church Parables) or death (*Grimes*, *Screw*, *Wingrave* and *Venice*). In the *Screw*, the primary gamelan-inspired moment (from McPhee, cf. *Grimes*) is at the end of the first act (I.VIII, especially the Fig. 87 'climax in every sense' at the reprise of the *Screw* Theme).[30]

The two central occurrences of the Theme are transposed into A^{b} at the close of Act I and the opening of Act II:

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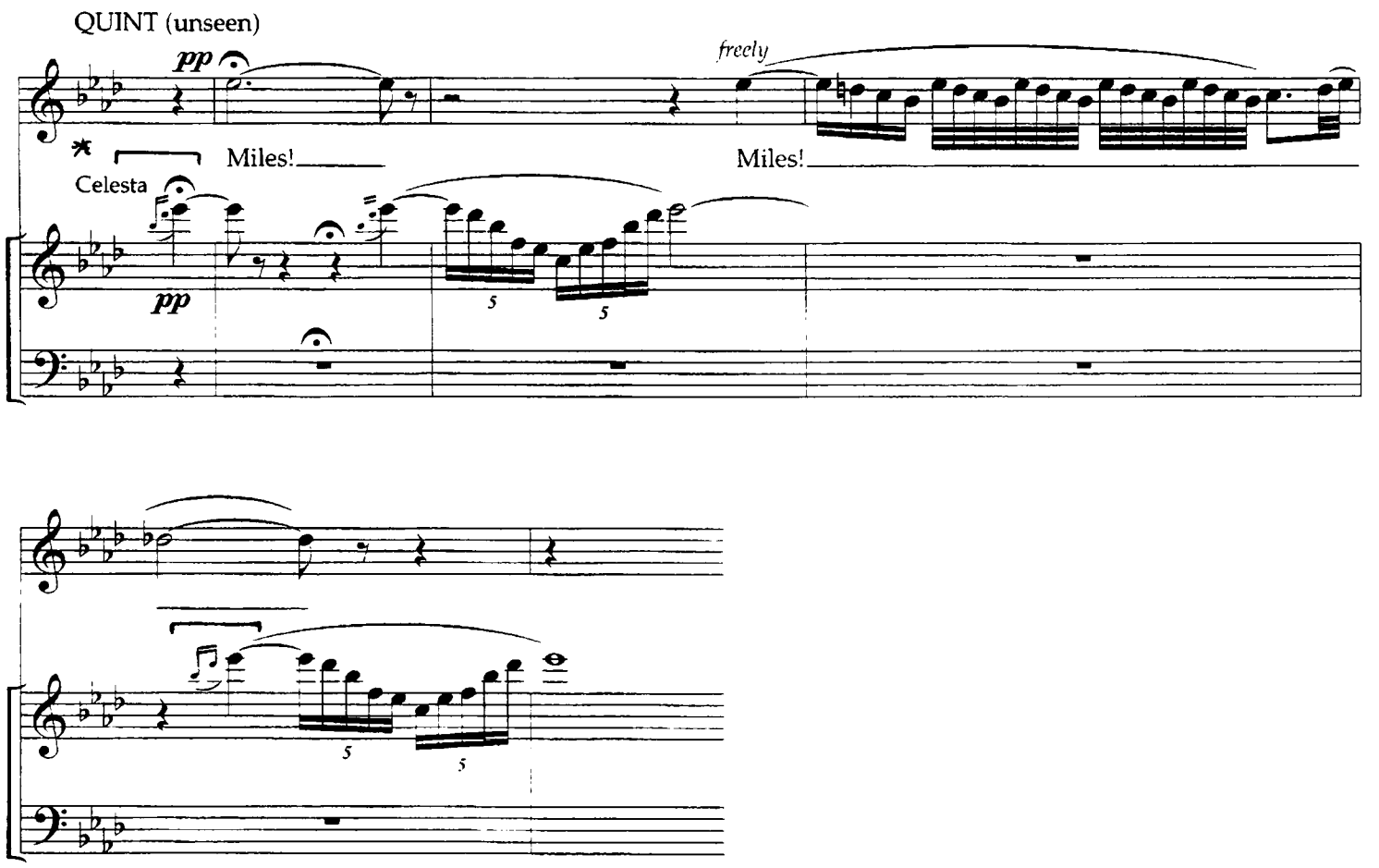
[30] Palmer (Howard 1985:101–25).

Ex. 6, i, d. The *Screw* Theme at II.I.



These central occurrences are indubitably connected with the malign influence of the ghosts, their determined willfulness again a striking feature of the twelve-note gesture, with particular ramifications for the reprise of the Theme at the *dénouement*. The A^{b} 'ghost' connection is bound up with the celesta Quint Motive:

Ex. 6, ii. The Quint Motive*



The celesta colour is a component of the implicitly homosexual Johnny Inkslinger in Bunyan (cf. Ex. 3, ii). The celesta also accompanies the death of

Peters' apprentice John (Grimes, II.2, Figs. 694 and 72), repressed homosexuality arguably applying to Grimes. However, the libidinous aspect of the Governess–Quint symbiosis extends these implications to involve pedophilic desire that transcends gender and sexual preference, a truly immoral vista from the Christian paradigm (if no other) that specifically amplifies the deep horror of James' original.

This texted form of the A^b Theme transposition (Ex. 6, i, d followed by Ex. 6, i, vii, 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned') clarifies the orchestral manifestation concluding the first Act (Fig. 87), where the children respond to the seductive beckoning of the ghosts. In the context it is clear that the children are lost: Miles has, indeed, been made as 'bad' as he confesses at the end of the scene.

In this kind of way, the tensions between the A and A^b forms of the Theme are made manifest as an apparent tension between the Governess' (A) 'saving' form at the beginning and end of the opera and the ghosts (A^b) 'corrupted' form at the opera's centre. From this the *dénouement* A–A^b conflict as the Governess and Quint apparently battle over Miles is dramaturgically logical.

3. The Catalyst Theme: the 'Governess–Quint' symbiosis

The *Screw* Theme is the basis of the instrumental variations connecting the scenes. Although it does not play a direct role in the personified drama, beyond those structural manifestations previously discussed, its influence can be felt through a theme that symbiotically connects the Governess with

Quint.[31] This Catalyst Theme is a melodic derivation from the *Screw* Theme, but in a form that can be sung and melodically decorated:

Ex. 6, iii. The Catalyst Theme

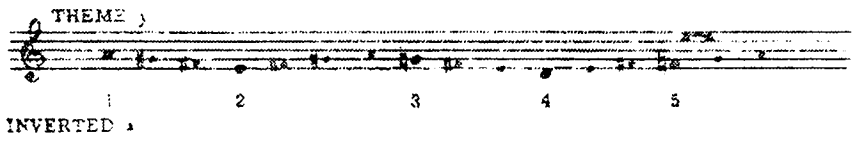


Table 8: Catalyst Theme appearances

Scene **ACT I**

I. GOVERNESS
O why, why did I come?
Fig. $^{3}4$; instrumental (Fig. 1)

II. GOVERNESS
You must be Mrs Grose? I'm so happy to see you,
So happy to be here.
Fig. 9^{4} (violin solo)

III. GOVERNESS
Mrs. Grose! He's dismissed his school. [...]
O, but for that he must be bad.
Fig. 15 [Note: This occurrence incorporates Quint's celesta figure, doubled violin]

IV. GOVERNESS
[Only one thing I wish, That I could see the Guardian –
And that he could see how well I do] his bidding.
Fig. $^{2}25$

V. MRS GROSE
Dear God, is there no end to his dreadful ways?
Fig. 39 *et seq.* This is the Divine Judgement Theme (see below) and is considerably extended in this scene interspersing the two following examples

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[31] 'Our society tends to divide up perpetrators and victims [of paedophilia] into neat camps. What if they are the same?' [...] '[There are signs of the paedophile that are classic.] In [the paedophile's] mind, he was an angel for saving these boys; that was his rationalization. He got tremendous gratification thinking he was their saviour, which kept him from recognizing that he is the predator' (Dr. Kay Jackson and Professor Eugene Kennedy cited in Butterfield 2002:24).

GOVERNESS
I know nothing of these things. Is this sheltered place the wicked world where things unspoken of can be?
Fig. 44

GOVERNESS
See what I see, Know what I know, that [the children and the guardian] may see and know nothing.
Fig. 46[5]

VI. Catalyst is replaced by Miles' Malo Song
Fig. 51 *et seq.*

VII. GOVERNESS
I neither save nor shield them, I keep nothing from them.
O, I am useless, useless.
Fig. 69

VIII. QUINT
Miles!
Beginning of scene *et seq.*

Scene **ACT II**
[Variation VIII, opening clarinet cadenza]

I. QUINT and MISS JESSEL
'The ceremony of innocence is drowned!' [Yeats]
Figs. 17, 19, 21

II. GOVERNESS
That this house is poisoned, the children mad – or that I am!
Fig. [3]39

III. GOVERNESS
I can't go, I can't, I can't.
Fig. 64

IV. Catalyst is replaced by the Malo Song
Fig. 70 *et seq.*

V. Catalyst does not appear.

VI. Miles plays a Catalyst fragment as the Governess exclaims rapturously ('Ah Miles! Miles!') at his piano playing.
Fig. [4]97

VII. GOVERNESS
But I have failed, failed, most miserably failed,
and there is no more innocence in me.
Fig. 113

VIII. GOVERNESS
O Miles – I cannot bear to lose you.
You shall be mine, and I shall save you.
Fig. 121

QUINT
Miles! [...]
Farewell, farewell, Miles! Farewell!
Figs. 125, 135

The essence of the Catalyst Theme, or at least its treatment by Britten when Quint is singing it, may have its origin in a setting of *Beata Viscera* by Pérotin.[32] Pears, who created Quint, performed the Pérotin as a solo at the 1954 Aldeburgh Festival. Undoubtedly Britten had become familiar with the work before Pears' performance.[33] The Pérotin may be heard as a concealed religious contingency in the *Screw*:

Ex. 6. iv. Pérotin, *Beata Viscera*



If Britten intended the Pérotin source to have meaning for the Catalyst Theme and implicitly the *Screw* Theme on some level, a possible connection can be made with the previously stated discernment of Britten's aesthetic attempt to 'make sacred' a situation that is constitutionally resistant to Christian morality. The Pérotin connection is most manifest at Quint's singing of Miles' name to a cantilena that is subsequently set against gamelan-derived textures

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[32] Harewood (cited Carpenter 1992:340).
[33] Strode 1987:56.

(I.8, Ex. 6, ii).[34] This scene is the crux of the manifold transformations between the Governess and Quint:

> At the end of the act, the Governess, though still not active, was in possession of all the facts.[35]

Britten's later (post–1956 Far East tour) juxtaposition of plainsong and orientally derived materials in the Church Parables, via the Christian hymns and orientally derived music of *Noye*, might be taken as an expansion of this approach, leading to the Western–Eastern juxtaposition in the Church Parables, *Wingrave* and *Venice*.

The 'global' spiritual tension in the *Screw*, via the Theme and Catalyst Theme in the respective variations and scenes, is also reflected at the local level to which we will now turn.

4. The Malo Song: 'guilty innocence' yearning salvation

The Malo Song sometimes replaces the Catalyst Theme in certain scenes, as shown above (Table 8). The troubling connection via interlocking thirds of the Malo Song to the Lucretia and Tarquinius Motives in *Lucretia* has been addressed above (Ex. 3, iii, a–b and 3, ix, b, which shows the Malo Song):

> MILES
> malo: I would rather be
> malo: in an apple tree
> malo: than a naughty boy
> malo: in adversity.

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[34] Palmer (Howard 1985:105–9); Cooke 1998:46–47.
[35] Piper (Gishford1964:80). Also Palmer (Howard 1985:101–25).

This song perfectly encapsulates Miles' dilemma as a child prematurely burdened with adult knowledge.[36] While acknowledging his precocious awareness of a tendency towards sin, Miles simultaneously reveals his yearning to be saved through the Edenic intonation of his opening lines.[37] This has important implications for the *dénouement*, especially in the Governess' relationship to Vere as 'executioners' of 'Christianised' boys. Because Miles' song predicts, almost prayer-like, his deathbed repentance and salvation, it must be admitted that as the Governess recapitulates 'Malo' at the final curtain, a redemption beyond the opera is possible for her that is apparently denied Vere in *Budd*.

This is a point with some relevance to Canticle III: *Still Falls the Rain*, written in the immediate aftermath of the *Screw*, although Sitwell's text ruminates on a humanist grace contradicting the Biblical (cf. *Lucretia*).[38] As with *Grimes* and *Gloriana*, the difference appears to be bound up with the different spiritual trajectory Britten ascribes to male and female protagonists in his dramas.

The Malo Song, in various forms, expands the thematic range of the opera:

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[36] Piper (Gishford 1964:81–82).

[37] For further ramifications of this dualism see Evans 1979/96:205, 217.

[38] Canticle II, written after *Budd*, utilizes the *Grimes* tritone A–E^{b} connected with Billy (A) against Vere and Claggart (E^{b}, cf. the A–E^{b} in Claggart's aria), and Isaac is spared by Abraham, unlike Billy by Vere, anticipating the pessimistic Canticle parody in the Offertorium of *War Requiem*.

Table 9: Thematic manifestations of the Malo Song

Scene **ACT I**

VI. Miles sings the song for the first time (Fig. 51 and variation VI).

VII. The ambiguous context after Flora's statements about her and Miles avoiding the Dead Sea suggests at face value that there is still potential goodness in the children (Fig. 59).

Scene **ACT II**

I. The muted horn picks out the Malo Song, indicating that Miles is already the wicked accomplice Quint sings he is seeking (Fig. 16).

II. The bass line underpinning the children's 'Benedicite' prayer-parody, 'O Mrs. Grose, Mrs. Grose, Bless ye the Lord: May she never be confounded!' (Figs. 34-5). This appearance severely compromises Flora's 'innocent' reference in I.VII.

IV. The Malo Song (cor anglais later Miles) generates exchanges between the Governess and Miles based on the fourth, which is the beginning of another musical symbiosis (Fig. 70 *et seq.*). Variation XII develops this as a pizzicato string mini-fugato.

V. After Miles has stolen the letter (Fig. 83^{5}, coda)

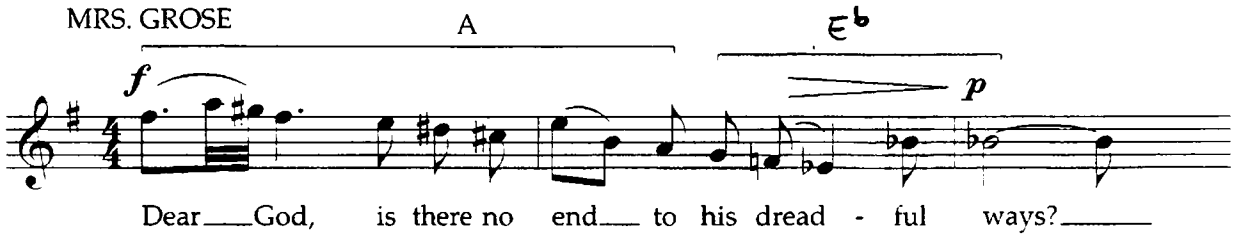
VIII. The Governess discovers that Miles is dead in her arms (Fig. 136).

The role of the Malo Song in unfolding the spiritual genealogy of Miles (Death to Life) and the Governess (Life to Death) is realized in the *dénouement* coda. She finally recognizes the physical death of Miles as symbolic of her spiritual demise in a manner echoing the convergences of the earlier operas except *Gloriana*.

5. The Divine Judgement and Humility Themes

It has been observed that the 'conventional' view of Quint's relationship to Miles is embodied in Mrs. Grose's theme 'Dear God, is there no end to his dreadful ways?' (I.V, Fig. 39 *et seq.*), which has been identified as the Divine Judgement Theme elsewhere, although it is actually a further transformation of the *Screw*/Catalyst Themes.[39]

Ex. 6. v. Divine Judgement Theme



The Governess also initially presents the conventional view. However, her nature undergoes a transformation through the dramaturgy in a manner that eludes Mrs. Grose. Indeed, it may be argued that the (Victorian) 'innocence' Mrs. Grose apparently represents – either through naturalness, repression or wilful ignorance – is 'gross' precisely because of her incapacity to adequately comprehend and help resolve 'adult' sins, especially when they concern the children with whom she interacts: 'her ignorant good nature and changeable

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[39] Hindley's designation (*MQ*)1990:13–14. It is acknowledged that Mrs Grose's statement may also be read as cliché or mild blasphemy, but these do not explicate the importance Britten gives to the musical phrase, both here and in the Finale. The roles of Ellen Orford (*Grimes*), the Female Chorus (*Lucretia*), Lady Billows (*Herring*), Elizabeth I (*Gloriana*) and Mrs. Grose (*Screw*) were created by Joan Cross. Cross had a singular voice that almost parallels Pears' in its consistency in Britten's operas up to and including the *Screw* – literally matching him in *Lucretia*, and dominating him in *Gloriana*.

credulity'.[40] This point, extending to the local Church, is a fact that the children exploit (cf. II.II in Table 9).

The appearance of Divine at the commencement of the finale (II.VIII, Fig. 118 and 120) indicates the kind of willed repression that shores up Mrs. Grose's 'innocence' against the threat of knowledge:

> MRS. GROSE [to the Governess]
> O Miss [urgently], you were quite right, I must take [Flora] away.
> Such a night as I have spent* [She cries]
> No, don't ask me.
> What that child has poured out in her dreams–
> Things I never knew nor hope to know, nor dare remember. [...]
> *Miles must have taken [your letter].

* = the Divine Judgement Theme in the harp, on C and D respectively.

The connection between conventional religion and spiritual impotence before imminent evil would appear to be Britten's dramaturgical point here (cf. *Grimes*). The placing of a church scene at the beginning of the second act of both operas – including 'Benedicite' settings – would seen to reflect this concern, strategically placed roughly halfway through the respective dramas.

The two hexachords of the *Screw* Theme are used in Divine to fit two concepts that can be transposed into its purely instrumental heterophonic manifestations in I.V. The A major hexachord (bearing in mind the 'triumphant' A major key of the Governess at the *dénouement*) fits 'Dear God, is there no end'.[41] The turn towards E^b at 'to his dreadful ways?' registers *Grimes*-like implications in Britten's use of the A–E^b tritone. The compound association of

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[40] Piper (Gishford 1964:79).
[41] 'A deeply felt expostulation that can be detached from the rest of the phrase' (Howard 1969:141).

Divine (I.V and II.VIII) with sexual sin, Miles' theft of the letter and Flora's evil speech, unequivocally align its meaning with the Christian view of sin.

A further theme for Mrs. Grose has been noted, identified as the Humility Theme:[42]

Ex. 6, vi, a. Humility Theme



The recapitulation of Humility in II.VII (between Figs. 110–11), is combined with Miss Jessel's Chord (e.g. I.VII, Fig. 65 *et al*) at the moment the Governess perceives Mrs. Grose to have abandoned her. This may have been intended by Britten to indicate the moment where the Governess' own humility is insidiously replaced by 'ghostly' (unconscious) spiritual pride. It is at Fig. 113, some 13 bars later, that the Governess cries 'But I have failed, failed, most miserably failed, and there is no more innocence in me' to Catalyst (Ex. 6, vi, b).

In this way Humility underpins one of the spiritual dilemmas encountered in the opera: a passively limited 'good' Mrs. Grose, whose humble sober estimate of her own limitations leads to her removing Flora from Bly to (presumably) more expert hands, versus the pro-active efforts of

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[42] Evans 1979/96:222. Evans states that this theme 'also recurs significantly', without identifying such.

the 'good' Governess whose increasing corruption by spiritual pride leads to the death of Miles in spite of her apparently succeeding in saving his soul.

Ex. 6, vi, b. Humility Theme combined with Miss Jessel Chord



Through Britten's use of such thematic material as the vocal forms of the *Screw*, Catalyst, Malo, Divine and Humility Themes, transposed into purely instrumental statements, a judgement rhetoric can be discerned in keeping with Britten's earlier aesthetic practice. A 'positive' view of the Miles–Quint situation as reflecting Britten's own view of male-boy relationships has been proposed elsewhere in Britten criticism.[43] However, Britten's thematic discourse can only permit this view as one possible narrative stratum: the moral dilemma is maintained throughout.

The fact that Miles is saved from Quint by naming him a Devil implies that he has also been saved from the Governess (i.e. because of the Governess–Quint symbiosis, both Quint and the Governess are, simultaneously, 'Devil'). The catastrophe of knowledge destroys Miles physically while causing the spiritual fall of the Governess, (cf. her final whimper 'Ah! Miles! [...] What have we done between us?') to the recapitulation of the 'sweet' harp chords that closed Act I accompanying Miles' rhetorical question, 'You see, I am bad, aren't I?' (I.VIII, Fig. 89).[44]

6. 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned': non-repentance and the birth of the anti-Christ

The claim that Britten (and/or Pears) had no interest in W. B. Yeats' poem 'The Second Coming', the literary source for the line 'The ceremony of

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[43] Hindley (*MQ*) 1990. This is a curious reading given the apparent fact that Britten never acted on his paedophilic desires, cf. Carpenter 1992:throughout.

[44] Basil Coleman's recent comments (conveyed to the author) that Britten originally intended Quint and the Governess to sing the final Malo together reinforces the connections drawn here in the final version (Mitchell, interview 2003).

innocence is drowned' that Myfanwy Piper 'came up with' for the ghosts, does not pass muster (II.I, Figs. 17, 19 and 21).[45] Apart from the settled issue of Britten's fastidiousness over the making of his libretti after *Bunyan*, he sets this line to a transformation of the Catalyst Theme, sung successively by Quint, Miss Jessel and Quint–Jessel. It would seem uncharacteristically careless if not downright reckless for Britten to have not given deep consideration to the context and meaning of Yeats' poem in the singular moment of ghostly revelation in an opera whose genealogy extends back to the composer's teens:

Ex. 6, vii. 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned' transformation of the Catalyst Theme (directly following the *Screw* Theme of Ex. 6, i, d also)



In any case, whether intended or otherwise, the simple inclusion of the line in the opera inevitably leads to a poetic contingency on the meaning of the *Screw* noted elsewhere.[46] Yeats scholarship cites the poem as 'one of the most widely read and anthologised of all Yeats' poems' and makes clear that it concerns

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[45] *Pace* Hindley *Ibid.*:5, who doesn't quote the poem. Coleman confirmed that Britten 'would have been scrupulous' about the poetic source (Interview, Dec. 2002), a point ratified by Mitchell (Interview, June 2003).

[46] Stimpson 1986:80.

the collapse of the Christian system or civilization into a new 'cruel, bestial, pitiless' world order, controlled by the anti–Christ:[47]

> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.[48]

When imported into the opera the context of the poem makes it clear that when 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned', that is when man falls from a state of grace, hope for a return to that state of grace via repentance in Christian terms is no longer available.[49]

7. 'The Bells' (II.II)

The 'over-bright' $F^{\#}$ major and general timbres, enhanced by the bell sonority (especially when *glissandi* from Fig. 44), musically explicates the Governess' statement 'Why are [the children] so charming? Why so unnaturally good?' (Fig. 36). This key, with the central section alternating major–minor as Miles addresses the Governess, was used in *Gloriana* to symbolize the sacred bond of love between Queen and Country and the lethal penalty for impinging upon it e.g. II.1, 3, 'Finale', Fig. 63, and III.3, 6, 'Lady Penelope Rich's Pleading'. Lady Rich's latter music embodied the same $A^{\#}/B^{b}$–B semitonal tension in $F^{\#}$ major as that in 'The Bells'. The outcome of both $F^{\#}$ scenes

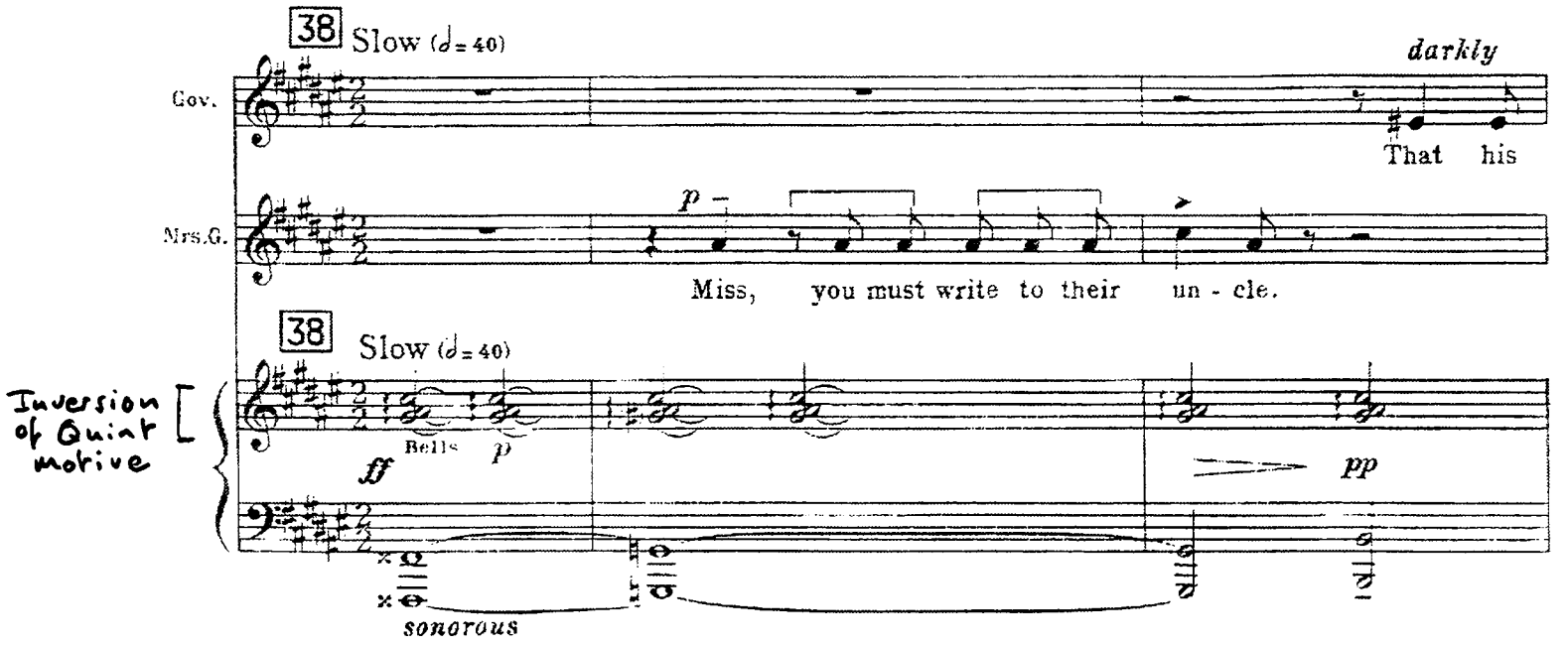
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[47] Gilbert 1965:57–58.
[48] Yeats 1997:68.
[49] Palmer (Howard 1985:109) ventures the possibility that the opera is 'elaborate blasphemy'.

involve $B^{\flat}$, the Queen's as she is provoked into signing Essex's death warrant and the $B^{\flat}$ invoked by the Governess' chilling semitonal slide to F major as she apprehends that she is now 'alone' (Fig. 55 *et seq.*).

The sheer sonority of the bells themselves, as in the bell–scenes of *Bunyan* (II.2, *25*, Christmas Party, Fig. 9 *et seq.*) *Grimes* (II.1) and *Gloriana* (II.1), inevitably carry marital overtones as well as a summons to worship. The bell pitches are later related by inversion to the Quint Motive, ironically touching Miles' question to the Governess: 'Do you like the bells? I do! I do!' (Fig. 44, i.e. Quint represents an inversion of the Christian perspective):[50]

Ex. 6, viii. The Quint Motive in the bell-chord (Fig. 38)



Miles' and Flora's liturgical 'Benedicite' parody has a precedent in *Grimes* where it suggests evil in a specifically Christian context.[51] Britten's

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[50] Evans 1979/96:211–12, who points specifically to the string figure of bar 9 in Variation IX.
[51] Evans 1979/96:218–19. Also Howard 1969:142. Piper's (Gishford 1964:81) 'The problem of what form the children's parody should take was eventually solved by a clergyman friend of mine: "It must obviously be a Te Deum", he said', is curious given the fact that 'Benedicite' is the parodied text in the opera.

subsequent employment of an authentically liturgical 'Benedicite' at the *dénouement* of *The Burning Fiery Furnace* apparently absolves all such evils at a face-value reading.[52]

8. *Dénouement*–Summary: 'A desire in which love and hatred so perfectly oppose themselves that we cannot voluntarily move'[53]

It has been shown that although the Governess' victory is pyrrhic, it is nonetheless 'a victory for all that': '[she] has saved his soul at the expense of his life.'[54] The capacity to view Britten's *Screw* as victorious in any sense requires a reading of the opera that is connected to a Christian or religious paradigm. The only possible alternative is nihilism – Miles' death is utterly in vain.

By the final act of the opera Miles is facing two devils in one: Quint, whose libido fuels his Pride and desire for power to which Miles is adjunct, and the Governess, whose entirely justifiable desire to save Miles from evil on Christian grounds is tragically supplanted by a blind Pride relocated in saving Miles for herself: she has become the devil she fights.[55] Neither Quint nor the Governess ultimately loves Miles for himself, but for themselves (i.e. conditional love). Miles is adjunct to the manifestations of their respective Pride, the *loci* of the battle between them.

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[52] The author discovered Britten's juvenile 'Benedicite' settings in the back pages of his copy of *Versicles and Responses* (ed. Stainer and Martin, Undated, Britten–Pears Library).
[53] Auden–Britten, 'Prologue', *Fathers* (1936). (Britten first experienced James' *Screw* three years earlier in a radio production.)
[54] Stimpson 1986:75 and Evans 1979/96:219.
[55] 'The redemption plot goes horribly awry and leaves a dead child on the altar of [her] religiose ambitions' (Poole 1991:49–50).

In the final analysis Miles is nipped in the vice of false love masquerading as Christian love (Governess) and a paradigm of Classical love (Quint) that will rebound on Aschenbach in *Venice*.[56] The Malo Song indicates that Miles' yearning is towards goodness and salvation in spite of his knowledge of evil. What the Governess expects from Miles is confession and repentance. However her method is more akin to the Spanish Inquisition – righteous religious impulse perverted into a tool for persecution and oppression.

The ultimate exposure of the Governess' false love – the falseness of her A major infused with Quint's A^{b} – perhaps discloses a more dangerous implication behind her 'love' for Miles, of which Quint may be a 'real' projection: *Eros* (sexual love) plays a larger hand in this equation than *agape* (sacrificial love). This *Eros*, as so often in Britten until the late operas, is located in power structures:

> I got the impression that the evil in [Quint] came from his immense passion for power. [...] The child would not necessarily be attracted by evil, though evil might come out of it.[57]
>
> Power was an issue which, without doubt, was one of the composer's preoccupations.[58]

This connection with 'power' is also linked to the theme of worldly 'Glory' or vainglory identified in Grimes, Lucretia, Vere and Essex.

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[56] Hindley (*MQ*) 1990:12.
[57] Piper (Gishford 1964:81).
[58] Mitchell 1994:12.

The Governess indicates her fall from grace in singing Malo – which can now be seen in terms of the corruption of power as much as any Freudian libidinous element (though they are not necessarily mutually exclusive) – a situation tentatively opening the possibility of future repentance and salvation in spite of the horror of the tale. She has become a fallen woman and she knows it, and it is evil represented by the ghosts that have brought this about, both internally and externally (cf. Aschenbach's 'plague' stemming from corrupted love in *Venice*).

Miles' ultimate choice of the 'apple tree' of Malo in his dying cry 'Peter Quint – you Devil!' ironically provides a stronger case that the Governess ultimately may be saved than that for Vere in *Budd* (i.e. the connection of the *Budd* Prologue and Epilogue suggests circular guilt in addition to the musical material discussed in Chapter Four). Britten's next musical dramatic work, *Noye's Fludde*, has been shown to depict the 'baptism' of the flood in a twelve-note passacaglia related to the *Screw* Theme.[59] The redemptive aspect of this solves, at face value, the spiritual dilemma faced at the end of the *Screw* in Christian terms:

> The dramas [Britten] chooses to approach have predictably recurrent themes, themes which deal with aspects of power, evil, suffering, and increasingly specifically Christian solutions.[60]

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[59] Allen (Cooke 1999:287). Cf. 1 Peter 20–22 where the flood, baptism and salvation are connected.

[60] Howard 1969:234, written before *Wingrave* and *Venice*. That Pears was to play a 'Madwoman' in search of her dead Christian son in *Curlew River* might also suggest a face-value redemptive 'option' for the Governess–Quint.

Such 'Christian solutions' would be seriously compromised in *War Requiem,* leading to the non-Christian *dénouements* of the later operas after the rites of passage opened by the Church Parables. It is to an examination of *War Requiem* in these pivotal respects that we now turn.

Chapter 7: *WAR REQUIEM*: private benediction, positive and negative

The War Requiem is certainly not in the traditional avant-garde language. But new works can be misunderstood not only for how they say something, but for what they say. [1]

In *War Requiem* the sacred and profane duality informing Britten's earlier operatic dramaturgies comes to a head. His deployment of Wilfred Owen's poetry through the liturgical *Requiem* Latin settings will be shown to demonstrate Britten's passive-aggressive questioning of doctrinally governed Christianity. This operates on two levels:

1. Established religious institutions.
2. Biblical doctrines, especially of the resurrection.

War Requiem is an important summing up of the concerns of Britten's previous operas, and an important work in preparing for the trajectories of the successive Church Parables and the late operas. After completing *War Requiem*, Britten claimed:

> I am certainly a dedicated Christian, but I must confess I am influenced by the Bishop of Woolwich and Bonhoeffer, and these people whom he quotes, and at the moment I do not find myself worshipping as regularly as perhaps I will later.[2]

In this same interview Britten added, 'It is becoming, as I get older, more and more difficult to satisfy my ear that I have found the right notes to express my

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[1] Britten (cited Cooke 1996:83).

[2] Britten (cited Carpenter 1992:421), cf. Robinson (Bishop of Woolwich) 1963 and Bonhoeffer 1953/62.

ideas with.' Britten's concrete reiteration of the relationship between musical notes and communicating 'ideas', as opposed to vague emotions etc., is striking (Chapter 1). The gulf between orthodox modes of Christianity and a perceived need to embrace liberal modes of theology incorporating secular humanism in the authors to which Britten refers is also notable, especially as it seems to mark a line separating Britten from 'worshipping as regularly'.

This difference between orthodox and liberal Christianity is clearly Britten's concern at the spiritual level of *War Requiem*, complementing the pacifist protest against war and communicated as musical 'ideas' across a range of techniques, especially the tritone. This 'quality of extension', in line with the spiritual concerns of his earlier operas, may be indicated by Britten's statement at the head of this chapter.

1. Metaphysical Ambiguity in the poetry of Owen relevant to Britten's settings

There are considerable similarities between Owen's and Britten's spiritual profiles.[3] Both had mothers who exerted powerful religious and creative control. Both experienced a cathartic rejection of the religion they experienced through their mothers and the denominations of their childhood and early manhood.[4] This catharsis was apparently bound up with the issue of homoeroticism.[5] It would appear that for both men this sexual component

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[3] Cooke 1996:2.
[4] Owen 1985:28–73, 246–47; Welland 1960/78: 37, 43, 45–47, 63, 71–72, 89, 91–92; Stallworthy 1974/77:39, 84–85, 288.
[5] Stallworthy 1974/77:82–86.

was to form a particular element of their artistic aesthetic, in which 'Christ-like suffering has unmistakable sexual overtones' – a point with relevance to Britten's earlier operas.[6]

Owen's conscious rejection of traditional Christianity was traumatic, 'I have murdered my false creed [...] that holds the hearts of nearly all my fellow men', striking words given his later killing in warfare.[7] Owen's rejection of the doctrine of repentance, like Britten's, is made clear in his letters.[8] This is an aspect of both Owen and Britten that informs the spiritual aesthetics of *War Requiem*.[9]

According to Owen scholars, many of the comfortable assumptions that might be made about Britten's incorporation of Owen's poems are disturbed by critical observations that Owen's use of the word 'pity', cited at the head of Britten's score, may be a 'corrupt parody of love and compassion', especially in light of Owen's killing of others in wartime.[10] Owen's thematic use of the Biblically-derived expression 'Greater Love' in the poem 'At a Calvary near the Ancre', set by Britten in the 'Agnus Dei', has been qualified by one commentator as 'an erotic "greater love" that leads the poet not only to indulge in self-sacrifice, but also in the sacrifice of others.'[11] Another has noted how Britten's 'Agnus Dei' setting 'demonstrates the closest alliance, of

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[6] *Ibid.*:71.
[7] Owen 1985:68.
[8] *Ibid.*:72.
[9] Cooke 1996:1–19.
[10] Auden (cited Mendelson 1981:252).
[11] Caesar 1993:142 (cf. John 15:13).

feeling and of musical material, to be found in [*War Requiem*]'.[12] Owen's letters also troublingly cast fellow soldiers as 'Christ' with his own relationship to them described variously as 'Judas', 'Pharisee' and 'Roman Centurion'.[13] This kind of relationship between Billy and Vere in *Budd* has been explored above:

> The 'Greater Love', which absolves soldiers from responsibility for causing, suffering, whilst educating their experience in proportion to the sufferings endured, needs to be called into question.[14]

This is relevant to the private aspects of *War Requiem* (and *Budd*), resonating with Auden's observation of Britten in 1942, 'If you are really to develop to your full stature ['as an artist'], you will have, I think, to suffer and make others suffer, in ways which are [...] against every conscious value that you have.'[15] Auden's implied sacrificing of 'conscious values', recalling Britten's 'religious background of my conscience', may be considered a key to Britten's metaphysical reconfiguration of Christianity around the private sphere of his musical aesthetics.[16] *Budd* and *War Requiem* may be considered key works in these respects, although it is a major theme in all the operas, perhaps with the singular exception of *Venice* (in which Aschenbach suffers but does not make others suffer):

> [In Britten] the consequences of Love – I use the capitalised noun advisedly – can be as catastrophic, as destructive, as hate. [...]

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[12] Evans 1979/96:452.
[13] Owen 1985:337.
[14] Caesar 1993:157.
[15] Mitchell–Reed 1991:1015-6.
[16] *Ibid.*, Carpenter 1992; Holloway 1992:5, who considers Auden's letter to 'nail the crux [...] with unsurpassed acumen.' The people Britten and Pears rejected were referred to as 'corpses'.

> What we encounter [...] spelled out in a variety of dramatic incidents, is the consistency of the composer's preoccupations, the most influential of which is rooted in a profoundly pessimistic conviction that Love, whatever profile or shape it assumes, brings disaster on itself.[17]

Britten's dedication of *War Requiem* to four soldiers, two of whom – Burney and Dunkerley – had apparently some kind of early intimate relations with Pears and Britten respectively, may also prove relevant to such private concerns, especially as Dunkerley was not killed in the war but committed suicide in 1959, two years before *War Requiem* was composed.[18]

2. Britten's dual use of the tritone: harmonic 'Devil', melodic 'Benediction'

In light of Britten's earlier practice, one might expect the spiritual tension of *War Requiem* to be predicated on semitonal conflicts related to the circle of fifths. In as much as this is true (i.e. the difference between the 'Agnus Dei' $F^{\#}$ and the closing F of the work), the primary aural difference between private and public spheres is delineated around Britten's melodic or harmonic employment of the tritone.[19] (Britten used the G–$F^{\#}$ semitonal tension structurally in the *Dream* the previous year.)

The harmonic tritone (most commonly C–$F^{\#}$) is primarily attached to the Latin sections, in which (Catholic) context its traditional *Diabolus in musica* connotation is retained, cf. Britten's stated intent to use familiar musical ideas

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[17] Mitchell (Cooke–Reed 1993:128, 132).
[18] Carpenter 1992:405–8; 74–76 outlines Dunkerley's relationship with Britten around the time of *Fathers* (1936).
[19] This can nonetheless be semitonally related to the cycle of fifths through $F^{\#}$-F.

to communicate 'certain ideas'.[20] This is most notable in the accumulating bell-tritones of the opening and closing movements. Britten retains his customary practice of using melodic Lydian tritones in contrast to the harmonic form as a sweetening or absorbing of the *Diabolus* propensity (e.g. the relationship between Ellen and Peter in *Grimes*).

Britten's dualistic approach to the tritone in these ways circumvents the attachment of any single symbolic meaning to the interval, such as 'rest' or 'peace'.[21] (It is striking that one critic, a close friend of Britten's, labelled the harmonic tritone the 'mourning motif'.[22]) However, the idea of an unceasing search for a transcendent 'rest' or 'peace' is plausible, aligned with the kind of unresolved spiritual tensions of Britten's earlier operas (i.e. *War Requiem* is not spiritually 'closed').

In *Wingrave*, the opera most closely bound up with *War Requiem*, the thematic manifestation of the harmonic tritone as the diminished triad is used to symbolize 'war', primarily in Act I.[23] In Owen's Act II Peace Aria, a problematic 'peace' is symbolized by chords of a sixth (e.g. C–G–A). This Peace Chord is far removed from the acoustic effect of the tritone or diminished triad. The relation of the *War Requiem* tritone to the *Wingrave* diminished triad may have further importance here, especially as Owen becomes a kind of 'devil' to the House of Wingrave.

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[20] For the *diabolus* tritone connection in *War Requiem*, see D. Cooke 1959:88 and M. Cooke 1996:58. For Britten's general use see Tuchowski 1997:72–78.
[21] Evans 1979/96:452; Cooke 1996:58.
[22] Robertson 1968:282
[23] Evans 1979/96:506.

Because of the seminal role *War Requiem* plays in Britten's approach to religious themes, a close reading will now be undertaken, emphasizing connections with Britten's *oeuvre* that organically illumine 'meaning'.

3. 'Requiem aeternam': the problem of 'rest' for the wicked

The steady crotchet pulsations in the bells can be related, via the opening timpani strokes of the opening 'Lacrymosa' of the *Sinfonia* (1940), to a similar gesture in the funeral-march coda of 'Messalina' in *Fathers* (1936, Fig. 26 *et seq.*).[24] All three moments share an imminent d minor, relative of the F major triad that closes *War Requiem*. Britten's employment of the alto saxophone in *Fathers* is a further sonorous connection with the *Sinfonia* and the Novice's music in *Budd* (Exs. 7, i, a–c).

The joint associations of Britten's strong musical response to the death of a pet monkey (*Fathers*), the death of his parents (*Sinfonia*), his view of the suffering Novice as symbolic 'Stations of the Cross' (*Budd*), and conflicted prayers for 'rest' (*War Requiem*) may not immediately strike one as any more logical than Britten's connection of pagan legend with Christian frame in *Lucretia*. But it is an indication of the convergent manner in which the universal aspects of the Latin segments resonate in the personal layers of the work.

The tritonal fixation of the bells and the chorus' doleful intonation of 'Requiem aeternam', the octatonic collections with predominantly minor triad

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[24] Britten (Mitchell–Reed 1991:883, fn. 2) indicates the religious component of the *Sinfonia*.

harmonies that form the basis of the sluggish string melody interspersing each choral utterance, and the web of chromatically decorated pitch *foci* (D, E, F, A and E at Fig. 2), create a heterophonic miasma in which tonal relations are undercut. The effect is one of static bleakness especially manifest in the tritonal descent of the 'Et lux perpetua' – a 'perpetual light' that sounds like darkness itself, at least in conventional terms. This pessimism is underlined by the previously destructive bell-scenes for main characters in *Grimes*, *Gloriana*, the *Screw* and the unrepentant sinners of *Noye*.

Ex. 7, i, a. *Our Hunting Fathers*, 'Messalina', coda



Ex. 7, i, b. *Sinfonia da Requiem* (1940), 'Lacrymosa', opening

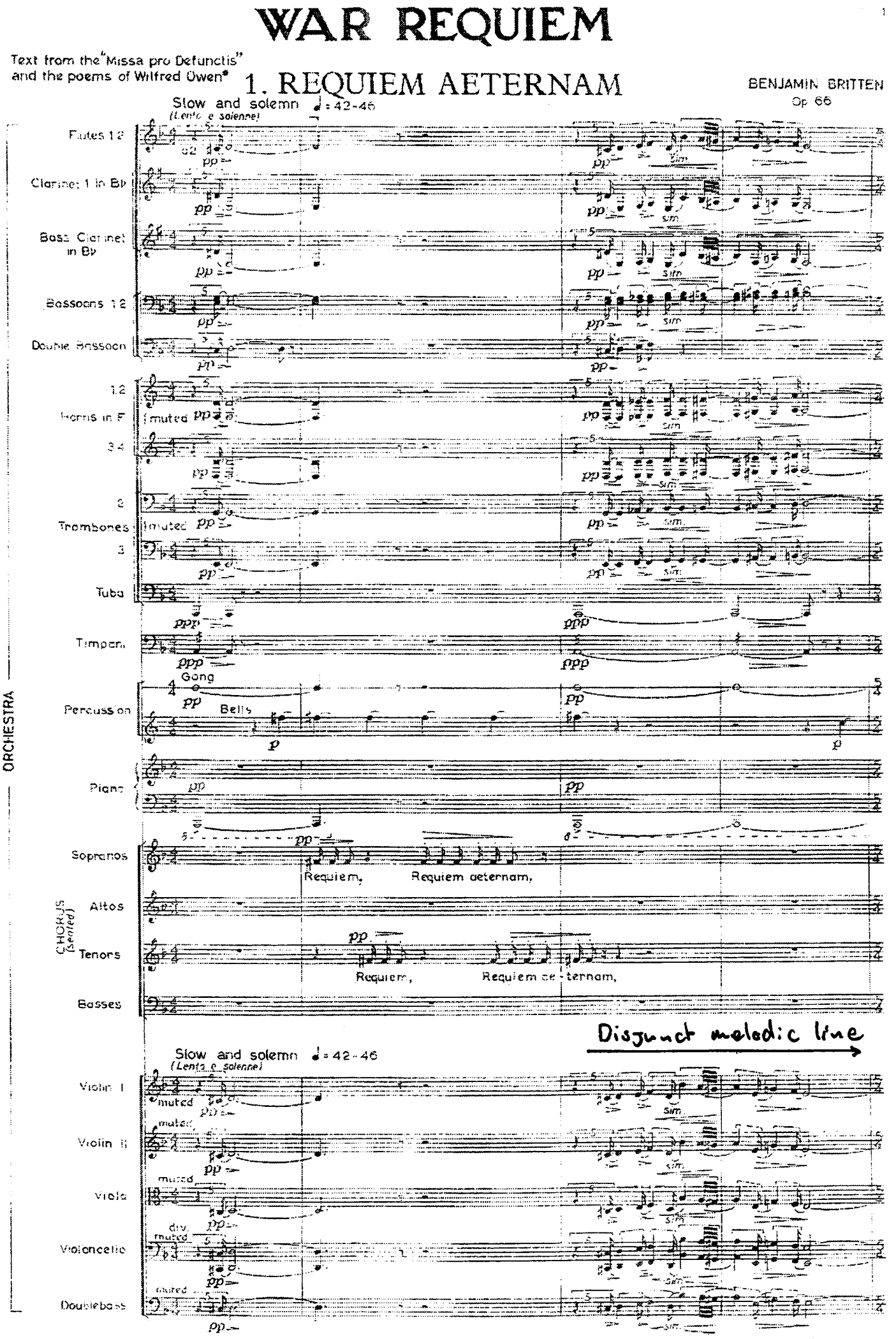


Continued over



* cf. the viola 'boy' theme, Interlude IV (passacaglia), *Grimes*, and the 'ground' of *Reveille* (1937), a concert study for violin and piano.

Ex. 7, i, c. *War Requiem* (1961), 'Requiem aeternam', opening



Rhythm: ·— ·-·-·— ·— etc

"d minor", regular ♩ pulse

4. 'Te decet' (boy's choir and organ with orchestral violins): childhood innocence as regressive, alternate salvation

The 'Te decet' setting is relatively brighter in effect, accompanied by a certain liturgical aura. Britten transmutes the dolorous 'adult' tritone of the previous section into spectral overlapping string pivots in the main orchestra associated with the former 'adult' Latin setting, anticipating 'Agnus Dei' (i.e. the orchestral strings now form a separate commentary in the 'Te decet', both spatially and in terms of sonority):[25]

Ex. 7, ii. 'Te decet'



[25] Evans 1979/96:454.

The boys' melody swings between these string bell-tritones:

> When writing my note for the first performance I spoke of the boys' choir, always marked 'distant', as a 'celestial sound' but Britten told me he felt that this was rather 'Walt-Disneyish': and could I introduce the word 'innocent'. [...] I therefore changed what I had written into 'an innocent sound from afar' and this he liked.[26]

Britten's insistence on humanistic innocence re-clarifies the themes of childhood innocence as a kind of 'paradise lost' in his earlier works. This idea is integral to the process of 'guilty innocence' germane to Britten's aesthetic quest in *War Requiem*. In spite of the F major that touches the music of each of the three performing forces in the first movement, they remain spatially separated.

The organ accompaniment employs triads based on twelve-note roots. It has been noted that 'Britten's use of simple twelve-note propositions such as this is generally reserved for portions of the Latin text referring to God's grandeur and omnipotence', related to the later setting of 'Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua' ('Full are heaven and earth with your glory') in the 'Sanctus' (Fig. 85).[27] The religious implication behind Britten's use of twelve-note propositions has been explored in *Budd*, *Gloriana*, the *Screw* and *Noye*, where a spiritual impulse, located in the will of Vere, Queen Elizabeth, the Governess–Quint and God leads to the destruction of Billy, Essex, Miles and the unregenerate world respectively.

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[26] Robertson 1968:269.

[27] Cooke 1996:61, also 'universe of heaven and earth' (55) and 'chromatic totality graphically representing [...] "Pleni sunt coeli" (70), cf. 'cosmos' and 'universe', Evans 1979/96:461 (see *Screw* Theme as 'cosmic all' of the Governess–Quint's 'will', with religious overtones of 'saved' and 'lost', above).

However there are specific precedents and consequents in Britten's use of triads on twelve-note roots as discussed in *Budd*.[28] There are many other strong connections between *War Requiem* and *Wingrave* but, given the centrality of the Peace Aria in the later opera, the triadic connection with the only span of music for the boys in the first movement is notable, being reprised in the first Owen setting.

5. 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' (tenor and chamber orchestra): spiritual dislocation–relocation

The previous C–F$^{\#}$ bell tritone is enharmonically transmuted to C–G^{b} in b^{b} minor, relative fifth of F. The later link of b^{b} minor with the 'Lacrimosa' setting ('Dies irae', Fig. 54), for soprano and chorus, may indicate a public commentary on the personal aspects of 'Anthem'. Such connections are enhanced by the bass-line, a newly vigorous version of the work's opening string melody, itself derived from the *Sinfonia* 'Lacrymosa' (compare Exs. 7, i, b–c). The recapitulation of this bass theme as a death march in the final 'Libera me' can be considered a further *leitmotivic* transformation (Ex. 7, iii, a–b).

The tenor soloist mocks the 'High Mass: real, genuine Mass, with candle, with book, and with bell and all alike abominations of desolation: none of your Anglican simulacrums' found in Owen's words elsewhere.[29] Thus, according to the practices of Anglo-Catholicism and the universality it

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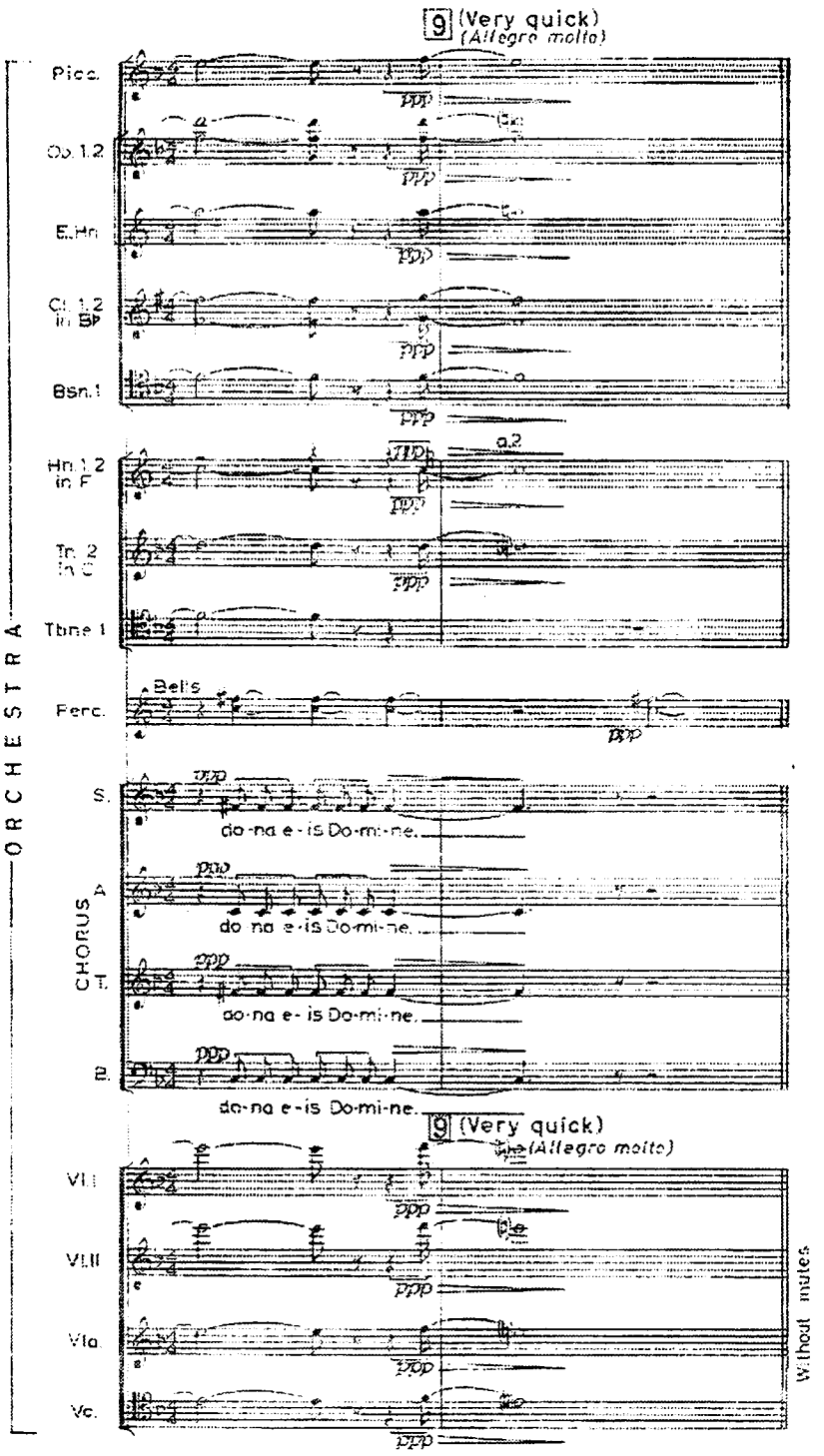
[28] The *Budd* Interview triads are not based on twelve roots.
[29] Owen 1985:147.

represents for Britten, 'Anthem' is intentionally quasi-blasphemous or a religious inversion (cf. Offertorium).[30] Owen's references elsewhere to 'a light which will never filter into the dogma of any national church: namely that one of Christ's essential commands was: Passivity at any price!' indicates a relocation of the Christian theme, amplified in the later Owen settings.[31]

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[30] Mitchell (Cooke 1999:207–11).
[31] Owen 1985:246.

Ex. 7, iii, a. 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', opening





Continued over

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

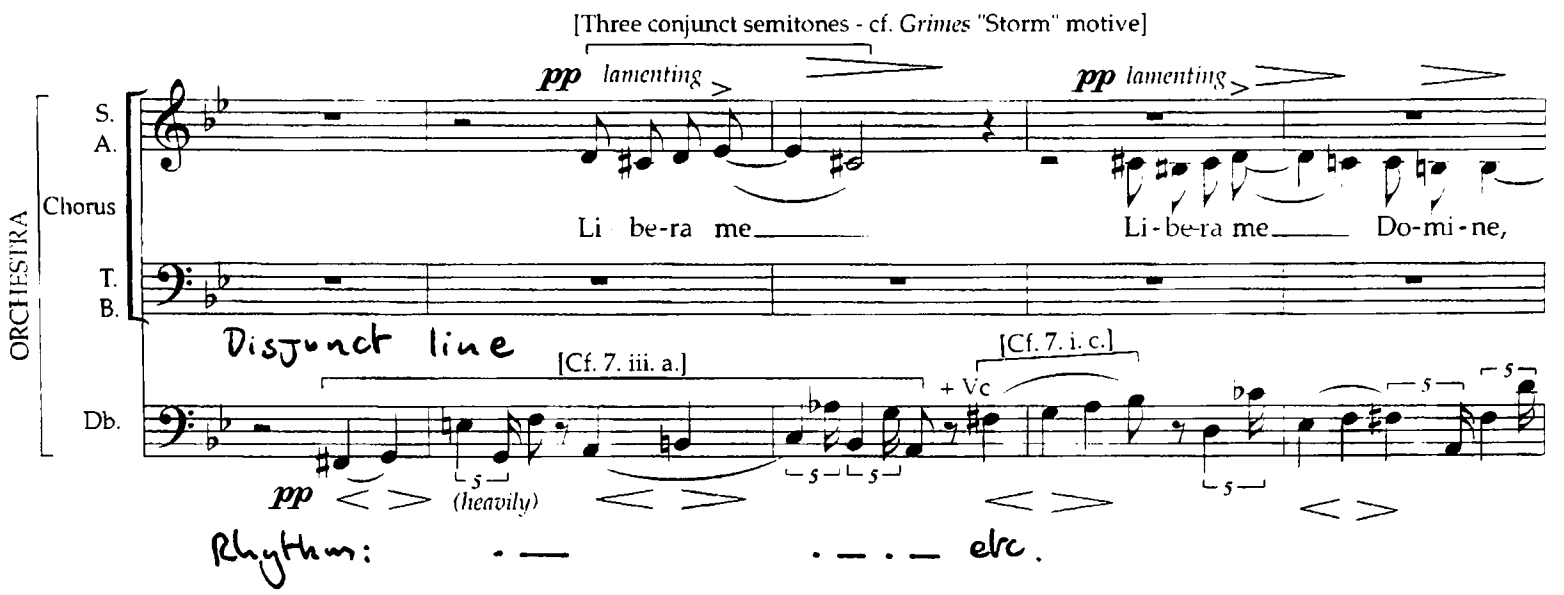
Fl.
Cl. in Bb
Perc.
Harp
T. solo
Vl. I
Vl. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.

B.D. (S.D. sticks)
f marked and dry
ff
pp
ter
for these who die as cattle?
f cresc.
pizz.
p heavily

10

express.
pp
f express.
S.D. (without snares)
B.D.
p marked
p smooth
On-ly the monstrous an-ger of the guns.
pp martellato
pp dry

Ex. 7, iii, b. 'Libera me', showing bass-line transformation



One's desire to applaud Britten's and Owen's righteous attack on the hypocrisy of State or nationally sponsored institutional religion, which supports war or 'socially acceptable' sin for political purposes (in *Grimes* tradition), is tempered by recognition of deeper antagonisms towards – or attempted relocations of – Biblical Christianity itself.[32] Such relocations might be indicated by the inter-textual link between the boys' earlier 'Te decet' and the closing moments of the 'Anthem' (compare Ex. 7, ii):

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[32] E.g. Owen's 'Maundy Thursday' (1915) and 1985:268.

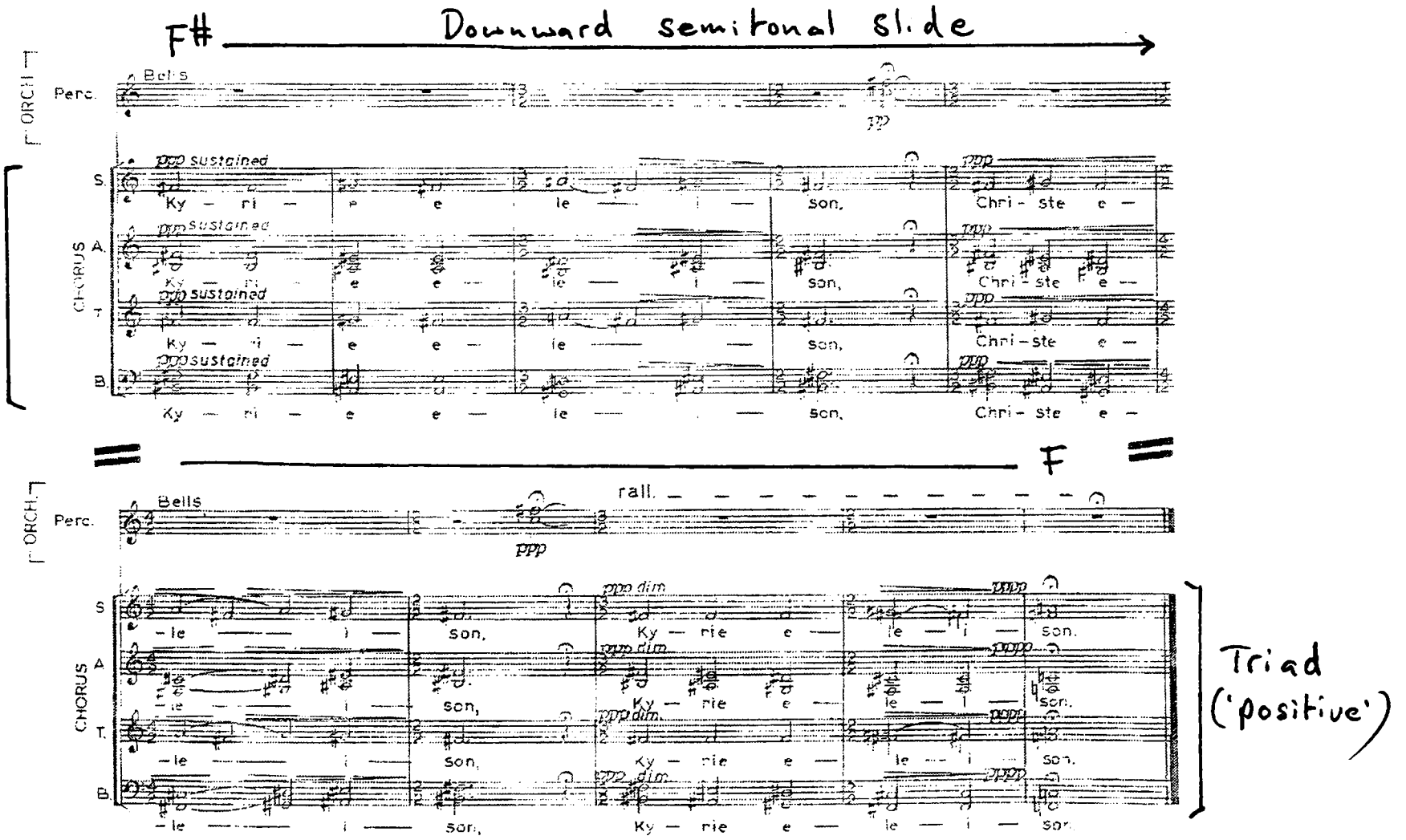
Ex. 7, iv. 'Anthem', close



6. 'Kyrie eleison' ('Pie Jesu' and 'Requiescant in pace'): Christ's mercy in the balance

The bell-tritone punctuates the three choral statements of the 'Kyrie', the traditional Anglo-Catholic prayer for mercy on $B^{\#}$–$F^{\#}$. Britten's relatively perfunctory setting of a key text of the Mass Ordinary (i.e. what should be the dominant text in relation to both the 'Requiem aeternam' Introit of the Mass Proper, and Owen setting functioning as a kind of trope), communicates a muted response to the foregoing:[33]

Ex. 7, v. 'Kyrie eleison'



This is additionally notable given the importance of Christ's mercy across Britten's *oeuvre* in relation to the view of *War Requiem* as one of his seminal

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[33] Rupprecht 2001:191–97.

works.[34] There is a mingled chime in Britten's use of this theme of Christ's mercy across his work (e.g. *Lucretia*). There is also an accumulated resonance of the 'Kyrie' within *War Requiem* itself. The same gesture returns at the end of 'Dies irae' to the text 'Pie Jesu' and at the work's conclusion to 'Requiescant in pace'.

The bell tritone resolution onto an F major triad is invariable in each case. The tonal stability of the progression to the cadence is further distanced by Britten's use of triads with added sevenths and ninths in various inversions. This is a technique Britten uses with ambiguous effect at the *dénouement* of *The Prodigal Son*, the final Church Parable. The context in which Britten inverts chords is often telling (e.g. the hymn 'realizations' of *Saint Nicholas* and *Noye*), being profitably contrasted with root-position triads at key moments of self-revelation, especially in contexts of 'love', as outlined in Chapter Four.

It has been noted elsewhere that the sense of closure the F major triad brings becomes increasingly remote and less satisfactory with each reprise.[35] In 'Kyrie eleison' it can be related back to 'Anthem' (Fig. 13) and 'Te decet'. Such localized referents are lacking in the two later recurrences. Britten's use of F major in *Bunyan*, *Grimes* and *Budd* has been discussed above. The increasing remoteness indicates increasing pessimism about the capacity for

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[34] Unfinished or unpublished works: 'Kyrie eleison' (1925); Mass in E minor (1925–26); 'Kyrie' and 'Requiem' in B minor (1927); 'Kyrie eleison', *Eight Rounds* (1927); Mass for four voices (1930–31). Published references to 'Kyrie' or Christ's mercy: *Serenade*, 'Lyke Wake Dirge'; *Grimes*, II.1, Fig. 17[3]; *Lucretia* (epilogue); *Saint Nicolas*, Fig. 36; *Budd*, II.2, Fig. 71; *Gloriana* (end of Act I); Canticles II and III; *Noye*, Figs. 33–50; *Missa Brevis*; *Cantata Misericordium* ['Cantata of the Merciful']; *Curlew*, Figs. 54 and 65-7; 'The Angel', *The Poets Echo*; *Venice* (see Ex. 11, vi, c–d); 'Yif ic of luve can', *Sacred and Profane*; Realizations from *Harmonia Sacra* (1975–76).
[35] Evans 1979/96:456, 464; Cooke 1996:62, 77.

'conservative' (Latin) and 'liberal' (Owen) juxtapositions to be integrated, the quest for universal 'benediction' on unregenerate states: boys' voices sing the final 'Requiem aeternam' to the *diabolus* bell-tritone and the 'mass' choir sing the concluding, distant 'Requiescant in pace', Britten's non-liturgical substitution.

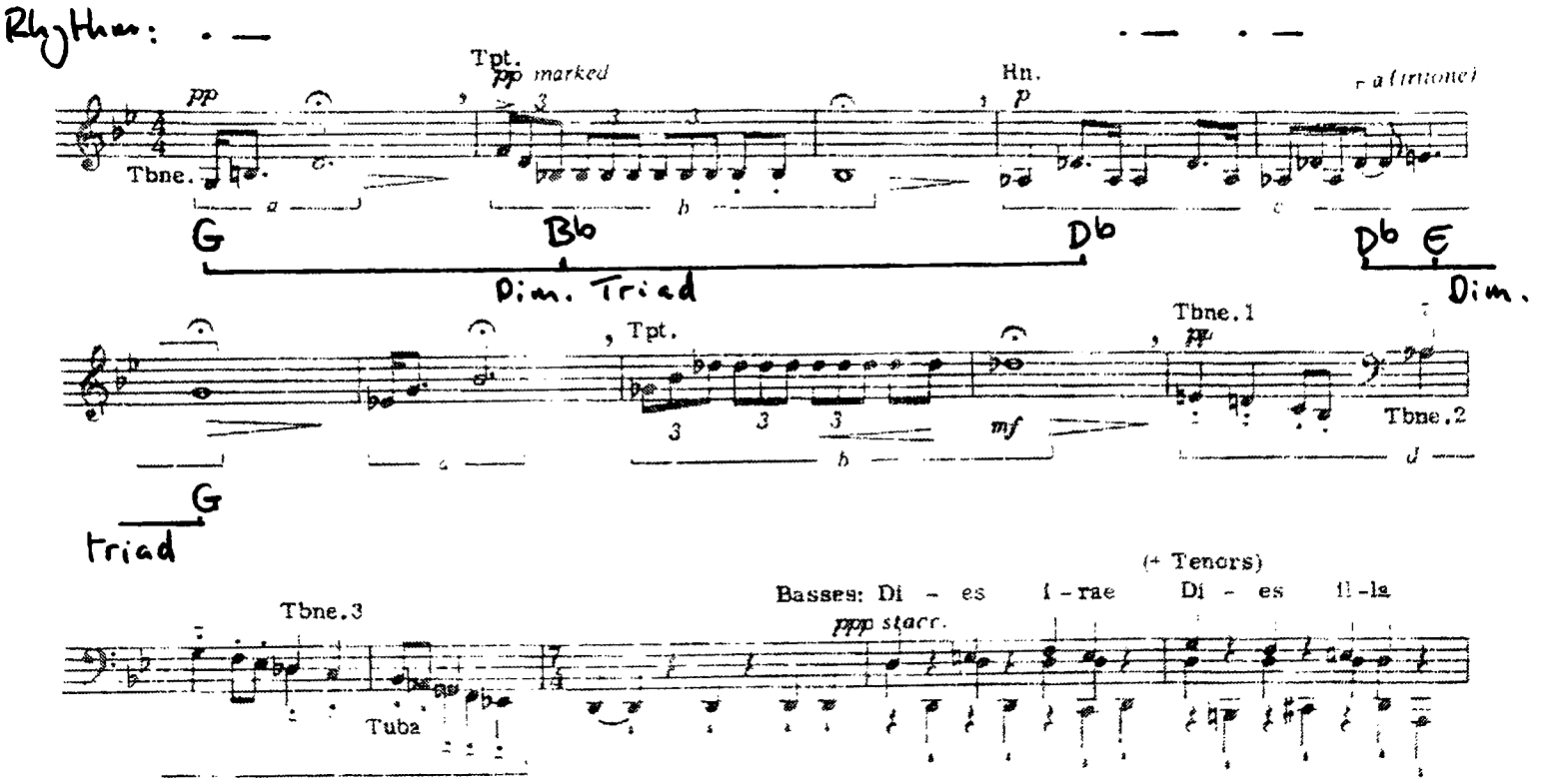
7. DIES IRAE: 'war in heaven' reflecting 'war on earth'

The relation of the diminished triads opening 'Dies irae' with those symbolizing psychological 'war' in *Wingrave* is significant in its domestication of the international aspect of *War Requiem*.[36] Additionally the 'Dies irae' fanfares bear 'the same kind of "archival" relationship to the development of the movement that we meet again in the relationship of the Prelude and [family] portrait cadenzas to the development of *Wingrave*.'[37] The connotations of 'Judgement' via traditional moral expectations is a tension shared by both works (cf. also *Sinfonia*'s 'Dies irae' opening tritones, and later trumpet fanfare in thirds and quick triplets (Fig. 22) with the trumpet 'fanfare b', Ex. 7, vi):

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[36] Also Cooke 1996:64, Ex. 3.10.
[37] Mitchell 1995:428.

7, vi. 'Dies irae', fanfare 'archive'



The horn 'fanfare c' is a further development of that in 'Anthem', itself a thematic transformation of the string melody opening 'Requiem aeternam'.

Britten scatters these Last Trump fanfares through his subsequent Owen settings. Thus the theme of imminent Divine Judgment interpenetrates both public and private worlds (cf. Epilogue, *Gloriana*, the opera being the closest formal 'loose-jointed' precedent to *War Requiem*).[38]

Britten uses the whole-tone scalic implications of the tritone to form the distinctive final 'fanfare d' that is hardly a fanfare in any conventional sense, being related back to the boys' *'ad te omnis caro veniet'* ('Unto Thee all flesh shall come', Ex. 7, ii), subsequently proving thematic, especially in 'Bugles Sang'.[39] Religious connections can be made with the *Gloriana* Cares of State and Lion Will Fall motives (Exs. 5, iv and 5, iv, a), extended in the

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[38] Cooke 1996:55.
[39] Cooke 1996:58-59. Britten noted the significance of 'fanfare d' in rehearsal (Decca/London 1999: CD 2, track 5).

accompaniment of Cecil's 'We are in the hands of God' (I.2, *4*, Fig. [8]39), and the two whole-tone hexachords of the Biblical inscriptions (*Venice*, Ex 11, v). Each carries fatal consequences for Essex and Aschenbach who reject the respective Christian implications.

Britten's portrayal of 'Dies irae' both as earthly battlefield and Divine conflagration accords with the Christian view of war as a Old Testament temporal type of Divine Judgement.[40] The precedent of 'War in Heaven' (*The Company of Heaven*) for the sound world of 'On Seeing a Piece of Our Artillery Brought into Action' at the 'Dies irae' climax (Fig. 49, see below) is an excellent gestural example of such.

The g minor key and rhythmic gestures of 'Dies irae' have been related to Verdi's example.[41] What needs to be identified here is the significance of the borrowing itself, cf. the discussion of the use of Stravinsky as model for the *Bunyan* Hymn above:

> If I have not absorbed ['Mozart, Verdi, Dvorák – whoever you like to name'] that's too bad. But that's because I'm not a good enough composer, it's not because I'm wrong.[42]

In spite of this rather disingenuous comment, Britten's leaving generic traces of his borrowings, even if at the subconscious level, are clear (e.g. compare with the *Sinfonia* 'Dies irae', Figs. 22–25, where the same Verdian rhythmic borrowing is fully absorbed in the bass-line accompanying the trumpets).

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[40] Evans 1979/96:456.
[41] Boyd 1968:2–6 and Cooke 1996:53. Verdi's *Requiem* was dedicated to Manzoni's faith, Verdi being atheist/agnostic (Martin 1988:50).
[42] Britten (Palmer 1984:96).

Through such techniques, Britten's use of Verdian gestures at a surface level inscribes the spiritual difference of the liturgical Latin from the Owen settings i.e. Britten avoids 'private' commitment to the liturgical Latin in order to bring out the emotional response of Owen.[43] Such contrast might be compared to the predominant public manner of *Gloriana* against the predominantly private *Budd* and *Screw.* Thus Britten establishes a certain critical distance from Biblical notions of Divine Judgement. However, it must also be recognized that this difference of liturgical Latin from Owen settings is still contained within the single field of Britten's musical voice, recalling Mitchell's observation of Britten's 'double-voice' in *Budd*: 'Could he not bear to listen to what, elsewhere, his own voice was saying?'[44] (Britten does not import liturgical music into *War Requiem*, unlike *Grimes*, II.2).

The revelation of the solo soprano voice in these 'Judgemental' respects is singularly striking in relation to women in Britten's operas, in addition to the historical precedents of Mozart, Verdi, *et al.* (e.g. *Gloriana*). Throughout *War Requiem*, gender and age differences between vocal (soprano, tenor, baritone soloists) and choral (boys' choir and adult choir) groups may be considered as important as the acoustic and spatial differences between the three instrumental accompanying forces (full orchestra, chamber orchestra, organ), an abstract extension of the spiritual concerns in his operas:

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[43] Boyd 1968:2–6.
[44] Mitchell (Cooke–Reed:1993:170, fn. 24).

Table 11: Britten's operatic resonance in the three performing forces of the *Requiem*

1. Boys' voices/ organ-church/ Childhood/ lost 'innocence'

2. Soprano solo/ Mother/ religious conviction/ heaven/ angel.
   Chorus/ society/ religious institution/ congregation (cf. *Grimes*)

3. Men (tenor (Pears) with a baritone)/ violence/ (homo) eroticism/ guilt/ forgiveness/ acceptance without repentance[45]

In 'Dies irae' we again experience the rhetorical, quasi-iconoclastic anger of the Thirties 'Dance of Death' manner transmuted into 'Dies irae' which is matched by some of Owen's own most rhetorical poetry in *War Requiem* ('The Next War'; 'Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of Our Artillery Brought into Action'), contrasted by some of his most reflective ('Bugles Sang' and 'Futility').[46] A complex picture emerges in Britten's g minor genealogy in which 'Dies irae'/'Dance of Death'/sexuality (e.g. Inkslinger, Grimes, Vere)/moral dilemma are manifested in musical tensions reaching apotheosis in *War Requiem*.[47]

8. 'Bugles Sang': Death in war as symbol for loss of innocence

This poem is ostensibly about soldiers awaiting the battle of the following morn. However, it can also be read as a poetic rumination on the tragic Britten theme of waking from the sleep of childhood nescience into the

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[45] Britten's agnostic Father, who did not attend church with the family, and the apparent similarity between Pears' and Mrs Britten's voice may be background factors. Welford (Blyth 1981:26), [Beth] Britten (1986):65, 76, and Mitchell (Mitchell–Reed 1991:14).
[46] Mitchell (Cooke 1999:202). Welland 1960/78:137 mentions Owen's significance for the 1930s Auden Group that included Britten.
[47] Cf. *Bunyan* I.1, 2 and I.2, *14*; *Grimes* III.2, Fig. 50; *Budd*, II.1, Fig. 32 *et seq*.

knowledge of the 'shadow' of sin on the 'morrow' of adulthood (i.e. spiritual war at Britten's 'quality of extension' level, the concatenation of boys and men in the central section relevant to the 'private' aspect of the universal meaning touched upon in 'Anthem' and 'Te decet'). C is established after Fig. 25 with the evocation of the voices of boys by the river, and Britten's use of that key in the context of 'guilty innocence' at the *Lucretia dénouement* may have relevance here. It is this quality that generates the *Requiem*'s continued search for 'peace' and 'rest'.

Britten's use of the cycle of fifths, identified in the earlier operas as a large-scale reference technique, can be identified through the sequence 'Requiem aeternam' (A/d) 'Dies irae' (g) and 'Bugles Sang (C). This sequence can be extended down to the F and up to the $F^{\#}$ (via A–E–B) furnishing the difference between the private $F^{\#}$ of the 'Agnus Dei' and public F with which the work ends.

The 'Dies irae' fanfare archive is translated into the private domain of the poem. The original G major trombone 'fanfare a' becomes a reflective and sleepy B^{b} / b^{b} horn figure with subsequent transpositions. 'Fanfare a' acquires a text: 'Bugles sang'. Inevitably this recalls the line from 'Anthem' – 'And bugles calling for [the dead soldiers] from sad shires', and thus, textually if not musically, we are made aware of the destiny of the men.

There is also a musical connection with 'blow, bugles, blow' in the 'Nocturne' (Tennyson) of the *Serenade* (1943). The link with the idea of nescient 'sleep' as an alternative to Christian redemption, a theme Britten

summarizes at the end of *War Requiem*, illustrates the deftness of gestural technique. The primary *Grimes* A–E^{b} tritone, underpinning both the four-chord sequence of the setting of the concluding 'Sonnet' (Keats' ode to 'Sleep'), and the concluding '[shadow of the] morrow, slept' of 'Bugles sang', extends this *Serenade* and *War Requiem* spiritual connection. The final line of 'Bugles sang' gives a text to the final 'Dies irae' 'fanfare d' ('Voices of old despondency resigned,/ Bowed by the shadow of the morrow, slept'). This fateful resignation and regression into 'sleep', reprised at the end of 'Strange Meeting', set to a 'Dies irae' fanfare indicates a private response to the Latin text.

9. 'Liber scriptus': Light shining in the darkness

Britten sets the 'Liber scriptus', as did Verdi, for soprano alternating between A–E (cf. Ellen's cycle of fifths in *Grimes*, minor ninths occurring at 'Rex tremendae'):[48]

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[48] Cooke 1996:51.

Ex. 7, vii. 'Liber scriptus'



This focus on A–E will prove important to the following numbers (the Grimes A–E^{b} tritone occurs between voice, horns and winds).

In spite of the personal aspect of an individual voice in the context of the Latin, Britten works out the soprano's flourishes in a sequence of phrases that are either extended or inverted. Britten's use of 'academic manners' like this elsewhere in his music for the Latin sections, related to ideas of 'ritual' and/or religious laws or doctrines, is again cultivated to show the relative organic spontaneity of the Owen setting that follows. The dotted rhythms and horn colour, connected to fanfare (c) and its precedents in the first movement, possibly implies the incorporation of 'illicitness' – whether war or libido – with the imminent opening of the Book of Life, implied in the soprano's turn from A to E^{b} at the words 'In which all is contained'.

Because of the prevailing tone of the *Requiem*, both traditionally and in Britten's specific case, the use of 'white-light' sonorities and diatonic certainty or strength appears in relief as almost unnaturally bright. This point extends to the later 'Sanctus' (soprano solo) and 'Hosanna' (choral) section (Fig. 87, *Brilliante* in D major, *et seq.*, the Iambic rhythm again predominant). In aesthetic terms, Britten's use of 'darkness' and 'light' contrasts may echo Claggart's 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and suffers' than the Scriptural doctrine it inverts (John 1:3). The tortured chromatic lines of the choral 'Quid sum miser' setting, itself relatable to the chromatically darker musings of the string melody that opens the work, accentuates the soprano soloist's dazzling, over-bearing sonority and the relative security of her 'conventional' I–V–I in A:

Ex. 7, viii. 'Quid sum miser'



10. 'The Next War': the mocking of Eternal Death

Although nominally in the A of the 'Liber scriptus', 'The Next War' is such an aggressively extrovert parody that ironic multi-tonality is inevitable:

> There is a terrible ebullience, a will to survive, in this music, to which the return of the 'Bugles' fanfare adds a sense of outrage.[49]

This 'will to survive' is located in the self who 'leagues' and 'chums' with 'Death', as against the Christian's location of his will in Christ who has defeated sin and Death.

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[49] Evans 1979/96:458.

The critical issue here is the interpretation of the word 'death'– later relevant to *Venice*. 'Liber scriptus' ('A book inscribed shall be brought forth') is parodied between Figs. 35–36. Ironically the music moves away from A into Britten's 'guilty innocent' C major at this point.[50] However, the containment of the tenor and baritone duettists 'We chorussed when [Death] sang aloft' to the A–E of the soprano's previous 'Liber scriptus' melody mocks the threat of eternal death. Simultaneously the piccolo and clarinet 'deride the painful twists of "Quid sum miser"', the genealogy of the horn fanfare through 'Liber scriptus', 'Dies irae' and 'Anthem' similarly conflates the difference between the worlds of the Latin and Owen.[51]

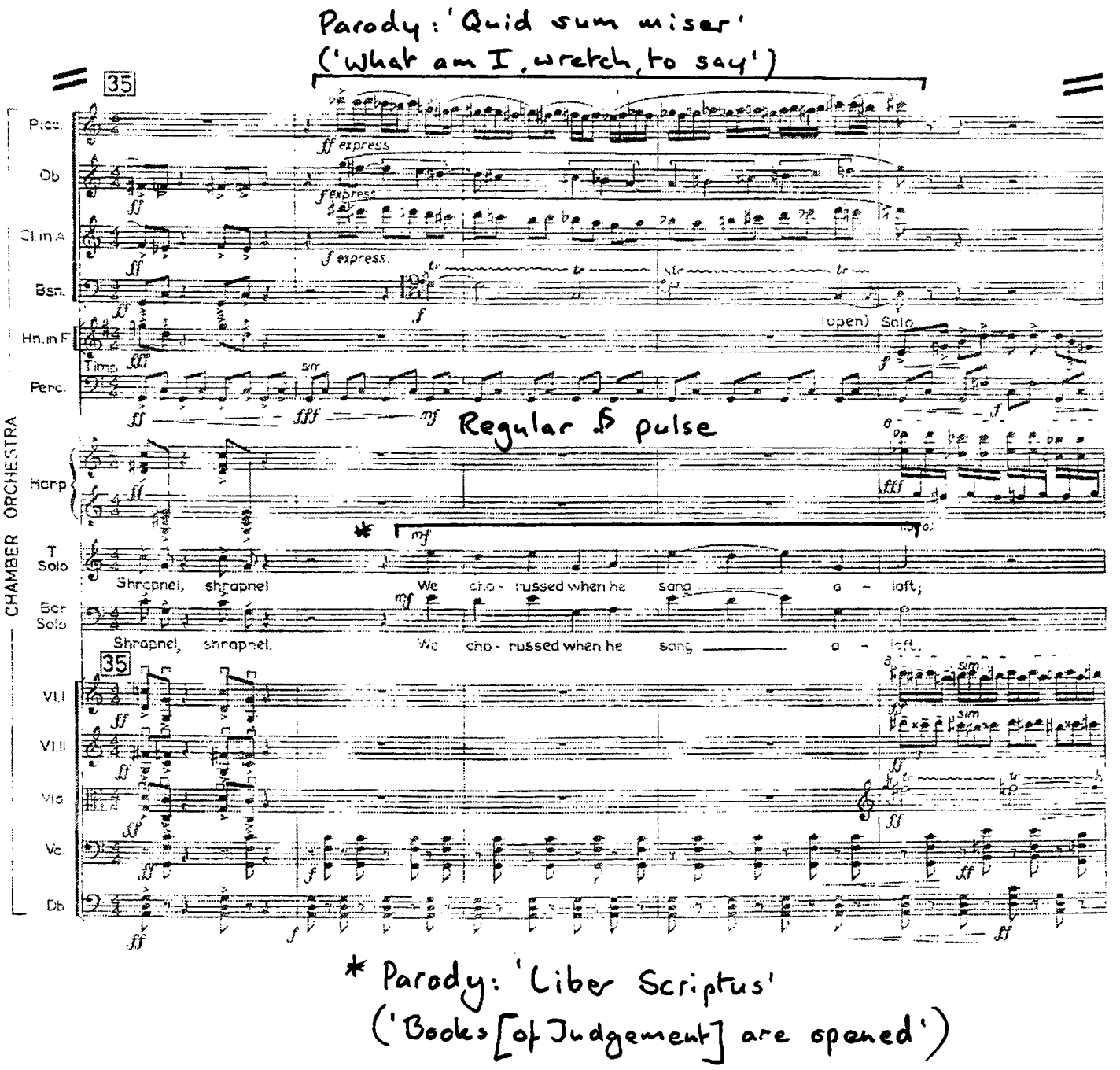
This A–E connection is extended to the later 'Libera Me' (Fig. 108), and the soprano's 'Tremens factus sum ergo' ('I am made to tremble'). The similarity of her 'et timeo' ('I am afraid'), as the chorus sing 'dum discussio venerit, atque ventura ira' ('until the trial shall come, and the anger arrive', Fig. 108^{3} in the vocal parts) to the wringing chromatics of 'Quid sum miser' occurs immediately prior to the climax of Judgement in the overall trajectory of the work (Fig. 116). This trajectory points to an interpretation of 'The Next War' as a defiant gesture towards the implications of eternal death. Biblically this is 'the Second Death', but for Owen and Britten it is 'The Next War' (the line 'wars on Death – for Life; not men for flags' being the crux in this respect).

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[50] Keller's (1973) 'guilty innocence' in Britten can be aligned with his earlier 'Britten's own C major' (Mitchell–Keller 1952:117).
[51] Evans 1979/96:458; Cooke 1996:65.

The ironic identification of Death as a friend by the two male soloists singing in unison in Britten's 'hymn-rhythm' manner ('Oh, Death was never enemy of ours') is flippant toward the Judgement Day background, Death and Hades being 'thrown into the lake of fire' as 'the books are opened' (Revelation 20:11–15, lines Britten had set to music at the end of 'War in Heaven', *The Company of Heaven*, cf. Ex. 7, x, a):

Ex. 7, ix, a. 'The Next War' ('We chorussed when he sang aloft')



Ex. 7, ix, b. 'Tremens factus', from 'Libera Me'

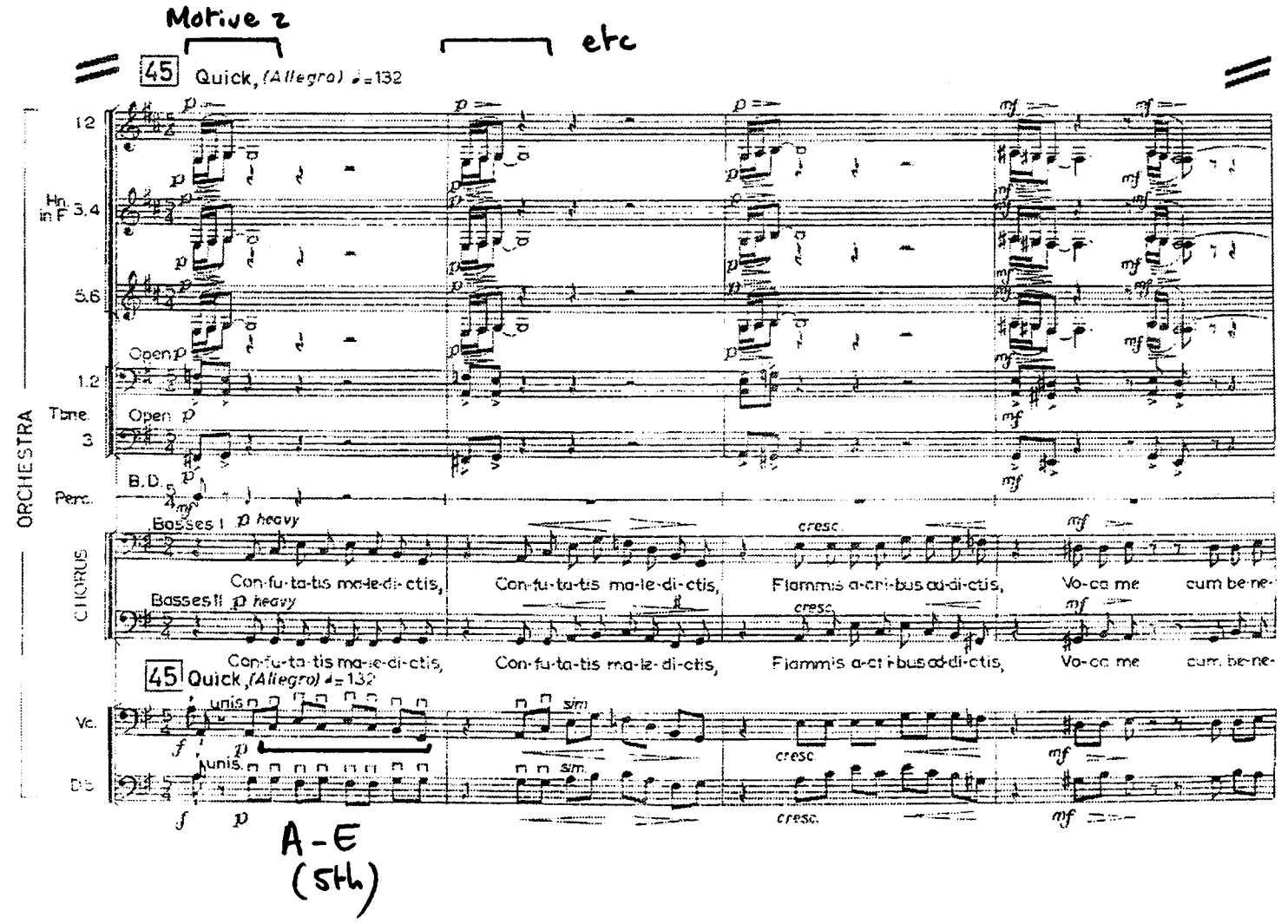


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* cf. vocal line at first motto appearance in 'Fathers' (Ex. 1, i, a)

Ex. 7, ix, c. 'Confutatis maledictis'



7, ix, d. 'Oro supplex'



Such parodistic posturing before the Divine Judgement seat itself, as opposed to institutional manifestations of Christianity, presages the break with Biblical Christianity in *Wingrave* and *Venice*.

11. 'Recordare': return to Mother and nescient youth

The whole-tone mixed scales at 'Mihi quoque spem dedisti' ('And hast given hope to me') reprises the melodic tritone of 'ad te omnis caro veniet' filtered through 'Dies irae' fanfare (d). The Lydian propensity, so common in Britten's operas in relation to women and children, is here telling of an 'untroubled

faith' associated with mother love. It is primarily the voices of women and children rather than the voices of men that sing of this hope.

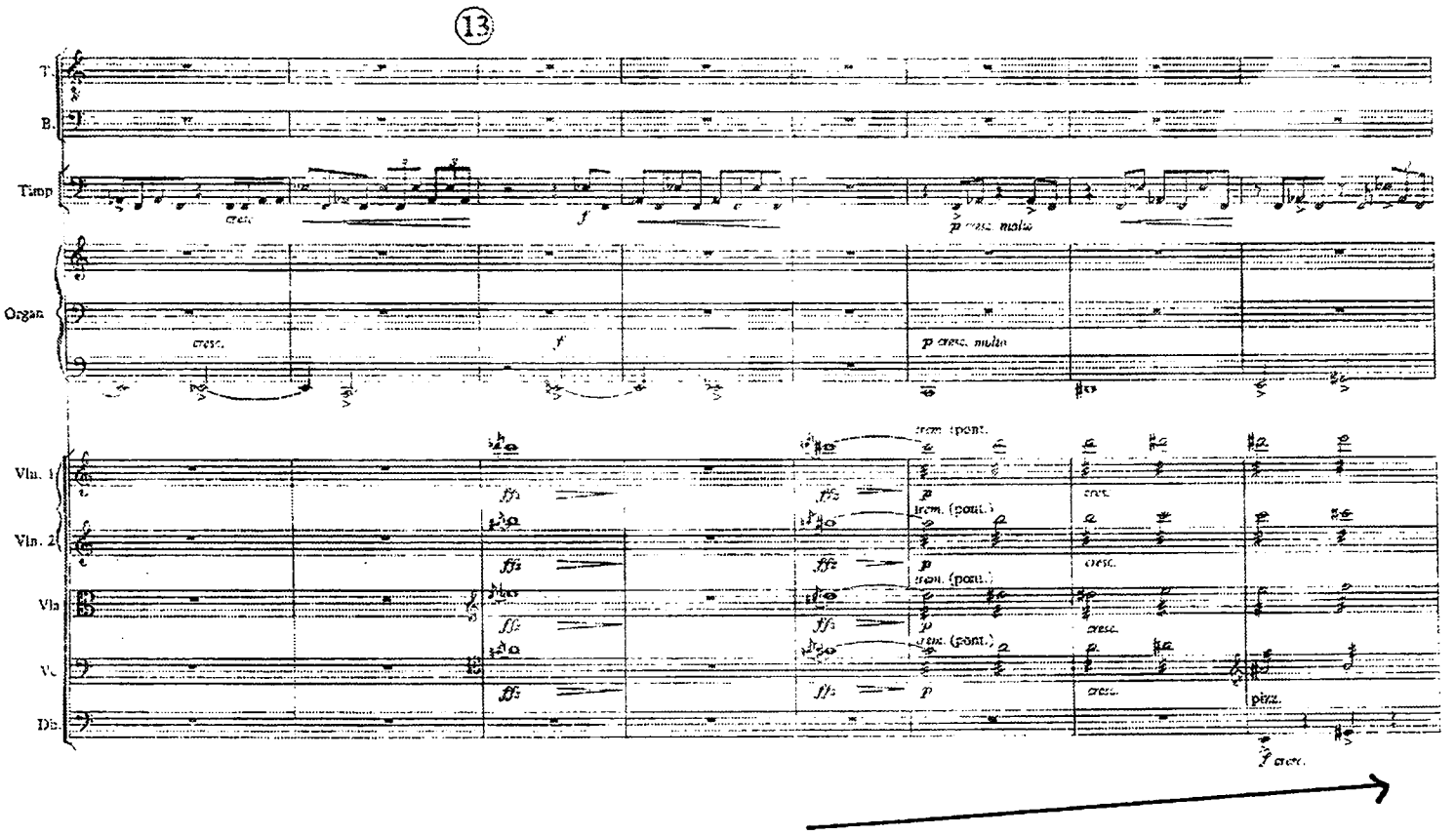
Within this tranquil world, however, there are also troubled premonitions, 'Britten's own C major' again indicating the mix of innocence and guilt. Chromatic shifts, mixed-scale implications and the sudden release of a more ardent passion at the invocation of the forgiveness of Mary alongside cadential whole-tone trills in the lower strings introduce a subtle note of febrile vigilance suggestive of an imminent awakening from the nescient sleep of mother and child. Such melancholy apprehensions are prefigured in diatonic music emphasizing major seconds associated with women and, often children in *Grimes* (II.1, II.2 Figs. 39–44 and III.1, Figs. 23–25); *Lucretia* (I.2); *Gloriana* (II.1, *4.* Table Dressing Song); and the *Screw* (I.II 'The Welcome' and Variation II). The *Sinfonia*'s 'Requiem aeternam' is an instrumental precedent of this sound world, the dedication of the work to his parents memory perhaps of background significance.

The contrast Britten makes between this music and the agitated, disjunct, minor-inflected setting of 'Confutatis maledictis' for divided tenors and basses could not, in the context, be better imagined. The tenor lines and horn punctuations adumbrate Motive *z* in simple, often conjunct, minor third shapes. As in the operas, it is the men who are primarily the sin-bringers, the cause of the Fall. This point is emphasized by the use of a vocal motive rooted in A-E, that of 'Liber scriptus' and its parody in 'The Next War', that will be exploited in the ensuing Owen poem.

12. 'Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of Our Artillery Brought into Action': simultaneous defiance and desire for repentance

The connection between the gestures of 'Sonnet' and 'War in Heaven' has been noted above. The use of male voices in both contexts is striking, as are the ascending string chords, although those of the earlier work are versions of the *Grimes* Storm Chord, a chord incorporating the tritone (cf. Ex. 5, v, b):

Ex. 7, x, a. 'War in Heaven' from *The Company of Heaven* (1937)[52]



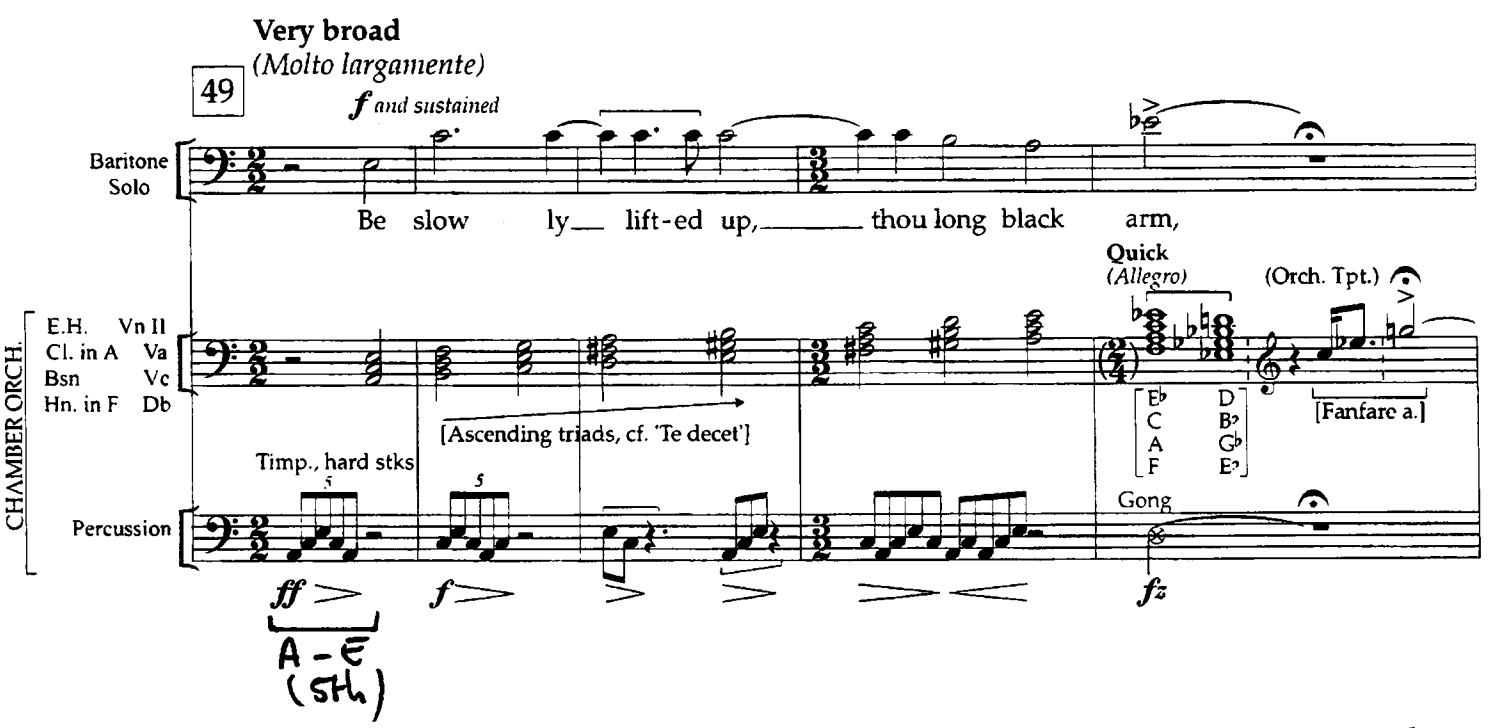
Ascending chords (cf. *Grimes* 'Storm Chord')

Continued over

[52] The text is from Revelation 12:7–9, 18:1, 20:14 related, eschatologically, to the Last Judgment.



Ex. 7, x, b. 'Sonnet'



Given the consistency of Britten's use of gesture across his *oeuvre*, one might think this connection striking, not least in the association of 1937 with the period of Britten's rupture with the religion of his childhood. That the timpani motive for the 'Sonnet' is derived from the earlier male choral 'Confutatis

maledictis' ('With the damned confounded') ominously strengthens such resonance (Ex. 6, x, c).

In Owen's original 'Table of Contents' for the unrealised publication of his poems, the 'Sonnet' was listed under the sub-heading 'The unnaturalness of weapons'.[53] Also under this sub-heading was the poem 'Arms and the Boy', a poem Britten had considered setting in the 'Agnus Dei', but ultimately rejected in favour of 'At a Calvary Near the Ancre'. A reason given for this is the overt homoerotic imagery in 'Arms'.[54] Given the centrality of the 'Agnus Dei' in the emotional structure of *War Requiem*, the disclosure at the heart of 'Arms and the Boy' would have been altogether too direct and revelatory.

If Owen's categorization of 'Sonnet' with 'Arms and the Boy' indicates that the 'unnaturalness of weapons' is meant to impute a homoerotic ambiance (i.e. that the 'great gun' is a blasphemous quasi-phallic symbol) then Britten's use of the 'Sonnet' at the core of 'Dies irae' becomes significant to the private domain of the work. The precedent here is the erotic imagery of Britten's setting of 'Being Beauteous' in *Les Illuminations* (1939, Rimbaud), specifically dedicated to Pears around the time they became lovers, 'And there is the cannon upon which I must cast myself'.[55] The 'our' of the 'Sonnet'

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[53] See Welland 1960/78:130.

[54] Cooke 1996:28 where Plate 2 (34–35) shows 'Arms and the Boy' in Britten's hand above 'At a Calvary Near the Ancre' including Pears' non-liturgical '? nobis pacem' suggestion.

[55] 'Being Beauteous' is dated 'March 16th 1939', three months prior to Britten's full physical commitment to Pears (see Chap. 1). '[Britten] said that he was really the male partner, except for making love', '[Pears said that] in bed [...] Britten liked to be the passive partner'. Thompson and Hussey (Carpenter 1992:130–31). Britten began *Sinfonia* in October 1939.

universalises the private implications as the poem, cast as a prayer, suggests a simultaneous desire and hatred towards all that the 'great gun' symbolizes.

The baritone solo line is accompanied by ascending triads in the strings doubled by winds. Triads often carry gestural signification of 'love' in Britten. The chromatic use of triads in 'Sonnet' may be related back to the triads on twelve-note roots accompanying the boys' 'Te decet'. This point extends to the ascending triads on twelve-tone roots of *Wingrave* (I.7, Figs. 167), where the illicit erotic undertone of Paramore, the family seat, is felt through the social intercourse of a family dinner. (Such triads also waken the lovers in the *Dream*, III, Fig. 20 *et seq.*). In each case the timpani outlines the initial triad throughout each phrase as a rhythmic figure and the cadence point is one of the 'Dies irae' "archival" fanfares in the main orchestral trumpets forming a separate 'Judgement' commentary drawn violently into the ensuing 'Dies irae' reprise.

13. 'Dies Irae' as impotent shout at God

The dramatic return of the 'Dies Irae' does not merely ape Verdi's non-liturgical positioning of this recapitulation in g minor, but gives it a crushingly ironic and violent relevance. For Britten it appears almost a shout of despair at the futility of the burden of the Latin text in the face of such a private psychological dualism reflected in the public enactment of physical warfare. This recalls the g minor of the thwarted battle-scene in *Budd* (II.1), a scene of impending violence that is also symbolic of Vere's sexual repression

and moral confusion via a mis-fired cannon shot and the returning 'moral mist' associated with Claggart (Ex. 6, i, b–c).[56]

14. 'Lacrimosa' as lullaby

Verdian connections are resumed with the arrival in b^b minor of the 'Lacrimosa', sung by solo soprano. Britten's melodic line reiterates E – the tritone now reinstated in a sensuous context (Fig. 54,). This can be contrasted with the opening 'Lacrymosa' of the *Sinfonia,* where the music builds to the violent explosion of 'Dies irae'. In *War Requiem* the 'Lacrimosa' suggests an almost consolatory lullaby sung after 'Dies irae', the rhythms of judgement now relocated into the world of sleep.

15. 'Futility'

In contrast to the prevailing b^b minor, Britten sets Owen's 'Futility' around A, his Apollonian region relevant to poetic references to the 'sun'. The face-value issues of war in the poem can be privately transposed into an aesthetic reflection according to Owen's lights, suggested by the fleshly sensuousness of bodily description.

The 'futility' expressed is, on one level, a Job-like questioning of God's purpose in creation. If the aesthetic issue is dominant, Owen's poem can be read in reverse: 'sleep' is taken in the context of regressive nescience or

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[56] Like *Budd, The Golden Vanity* (1966), a vaudeville for boys' voices and piano, has a fired cannon and the death of a boy. Allen (Cooke 1999:289–90).

unknowingness, implying a fundamental questioning of the nature of civilization (cf. 'Strange Meeting').[57] This is a Britten operatic theme. Aschenbach's sleep in death after he has rejected both his Protestantism and creative habits is an extension of this (*Venice*, i.e. his death is 'futile' from a Christian perspective, although it gives birth to an opera and, it has been argued by another, is aesthetically justified).[58]

The desire to move the dead 'back into the sun' expresses a spiritual desire for the 'corrupted' to be returned to nescient innocence, to an imaginary aesthetic world, not of Christian eternal life but of Classical eternal youth, Britten's theme from the A major of *Young Apollo* (1939) to *Venice*. A certain distance has been travelled from Ellen Orford's 'O pity those who try to bring,/ A shadowed life into the sun' (*Grimes*, II.1, Fig. 32^5 *et seq.*).

In light of these issues, Britten's interaction of musical and verbal texts is double-edged:

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[57] The second half of the poem 'The Fates', which Owen referred to as his 'Gospel', supports this thesis (Owen 1985:258–59).
[58] Keller 1973:239.

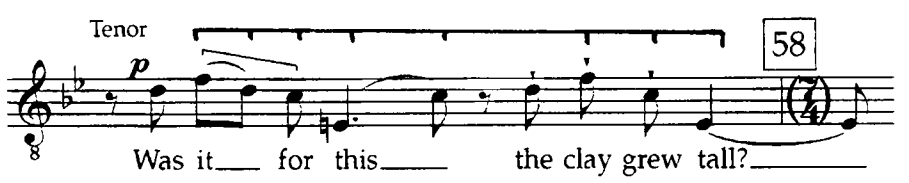
Ex. 7, xi, a. Lacrimosa (inter-textual references)



Ex. 7, xi, b. 'The kind old sun will know'



Ex. 7, xi, c. 'Was it for this the clay grew tall'



The cross-references here imply two rhetorical questions:

1. Is it for death in war that men were created?

2. Is it for judgement and eternal death that the sinner is resurrected?

However, the condition of repentance on the second illustrates the continued tension between the Owen perspective and the Latin text: for the secular humanist death is the end of the aestheticised life ('The End' being the title of a subsequent Owen setting).

16. 'OFFERTORIUM': 'innocence' made 'guilty' through sacrifice

The 'Offertorium' breaks with the rest of the work in that the predominating tritone axis shifts from C–F$^{\#}$ to G–C$^{\#}$, a fifth higher, affirming Britten's form-building preference for the cycles of fifths. The boys' choir sing the text 'Domine Jesu Christe' to organ roulades (recalling the *Missa Brevis* of 1959) in c$^{\#}$ minor, Britten's symbol of sin (see *Lucretia*). This is highly ironic territory preparing for the Owen's setting.[59] Britten's self-quotation from Canticle II: *Abraham and Isaac* for the subject of the (traditional) fugual treatment of 'quam olim Abrahae promisti, et semini ejus' ('As Thou once didst promise to Abraham, and his offspring') may be profitably compared with the consummatory form of the subject at 'In paradisum', where private and public domains temporarily conflate in a kind of benedictory lullaby (cf. Ex. 7, xii, a–c).

The 'wounded' return of the boys' voices at the 'Hostias' after the central Owen setting bears out Britten's recorded comments that the boys symbolize young soldiers going to their deaths.[60] Given Britten's insistence that the boys also symbolize 'innocence', the act of sacrifice that takes place in the Owen setting falls in line with the concerns of Britten's operas, highlighted in ironically religious terms.

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[59] Evans 1979/96:138.
[60] Decca/London 1999: CD 2, track 9.

17. 'The Parable of the old man and the young'

Given its subversion in *War Requiem*, an important precedent for *Wingrave*, a brief overview of the importance of the Abraham–Isaac relationship in Britten's art follows.[61] It is not only the Biblical narrative (Gen. 22) that is ironically savaged in the Owen poem. Britten also subjects Canticle II to an act of musical obliteration.[62]

The Abraham and Isaac narrative, predictive of the resurrection of Christ, is directly relatable to the promise of 'quam olim Abrahae'. As Scripture makes clear, Abraham's faith was not blind but was displayed through the power of reason and trust in the fact that the God who commanded 'sacrifice your son' was the same God who had earlier promised 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Thus he became the Father of Faith.[63]

Because Abraham's faith was so reasoned, God stops the sacrifice before it happens, it already being faithfully executed in Abraham's heart. Instead God provides a ram (not a lamb), which Abraham sacrifices in Isaac's place. Abraham's earlier comment to Isaac, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son', is traditionally viewed as prophetic of God sending his One and Only Son, the Lamb of God, to be sacrificed on the

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[61] Mitchell 1995:433.

[62] Roseberry (Reed 1995:253–66).

[63] Hebrews 11:17–19, cf. Genesis 22:5, where Abraham makes it clear that he trusts that he will return with his son ('*We* will worship and then *we* will come back to you'). Britten's retention of the medieval references to 'Trinity' and 'Jesu, have pity on me' in Canticle II enhance this resurrection relevance (cf. Galatians 3:8).

same mountain some two thousand years later.[64] This is the underlying theological disruption behind the Owen poem, a 'monstrous subversion of the Bible story [...] depicting Abraham's turning away from God.'[65]

Vere's actions in *Budd* conform to the Abram of Owen's parable rather than the Abraham of Canticle II written in its aftermath. Billy's and Isaac's death sentences in *Budd* and the *Canticle* are delivered to triadic accompaniment. Therefore Britten's setting of Owen's parody becomes a new key in estimating Britten's view of Vere (see Chapter 4).

It is no longer simply 'State Religion' being challenged. Rather it is a challenge against Biblical faith and the resurrection.[66] In this specific sense 'Futility' in 'Dies irae' serves as preparation. 'The End', concluding the subsequent 'Sanctus' movement, provides a point of disintegration, out of which will come the relocation of Christianity in 'Agnus Dei'/'At a Calvary'.[67]

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[64] Owen retains the Biblical reference to the 'angel' and Britten gives the role to tenor and baritone soloists after the manner of Canticle II where Britten had changed the final Heavenly pronouncement from 'angel' to 'God'. The 'angel' music is in E^b (Canticle) and Lydian C (Offertorium).

[65] Roseberry (Reed 1995:254).

[66] 'I don't think [Ben] really had any particular conviction as to what was going to happen after death, but he was certainly not afraid of dying'. Pears (cited Carpenter 1992:583).

[67] Cooke 1996:67; Rupprecht 2001:215: 'In the end, it is the defiant attitude to divine authority depicted in Owen's reversal of the Genesis story that resonates most with the larger pattern of the War *Requiem* tropes – their secular interventions challenge the canonical authority of the sacred.' 'Challenge' goes beyond 'questions' indicating aggression over pacifism in Britten's later stance towards Christianity.

18. 'SANCTUS': sacred/subverted holiness

The restoration of the F#–C Diabolus bell-tritone in gamelan-like textures with the soprano soloist interpolating Phrygian colours in an enharmonic F# major is significant. The 'over-bright' cry of 'Holy, Holy, Holy' by a woman (against the only overt orientally derived music in *War Requiem*) anticipates her symbolic benediction upon unrepentant states at 'In paradisum'. However Britten's gamelan gesture is simultaneously indicative of an 'unattainable' state:[68] unregenerate sin, homosexual or otherwise, is declared forever unholy in Scripture, and the attempted aesthetic synthesis is ultimately a spiritual *legerdemain*.

This musical situation in the Latin text underpins Britten's passive–aggressive challenge to Scriptural authority via Owen's poems. However, the ambiguity of the moment is demonstrated by the subsequent twelve-note free-choral chanting of 'Pleni sunt caeli' ('Peace on earth') sung by humanity in the mass. The twelve-note progression to a dominant A into D at the 'Hosanna' directly anticipates the progression from the family portrait 'archive' into Owen's theme in D at the opening of *Wingrave*, an opera about a man seeking earthly peace, who instead finds death.[69]

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[68] Cooke 1996:70.

[69] 'Sanctus' of *Missa Brevis*, where the twelve-note rotations in the organ accompany boys' voices, enhances this complex situation. Allen (Cooke 1999:288–89).

19. 'The End': resurrection refused

Using *War Requiem* as prime example, Pears stated that Britten was ultimately interested in 'reconciling' and 'building up' through synthesis and that 'post-Webern fragmentation' was nothing to him.[70] Yet at the conclusion of 'The End' Britten's music does come as close to complete fragmentation as it ever does in his work.[71] The title of the poem suggests the end as an end, and literary criticism confirms this.[72]

The d minor key and chromatic constrictions of the baritone soloist's melodic line negates the religious affirmations of the previous Latin section.[73] Major key interpolations of D–A^{b}–F–A–G–E^{b} and C (Lydian), outlined in the harp, fail to brighten the tone of pessimism, the initial D–A^{b} outlining the predominant tritonal form. At Fig. 94 the baritone confirms C major against d (half-diminished) with the question 'Shall Life renew these bodies?' Bitonality, obviously depicting the struggle between doubt and belief in the context, persists (c against V–I in D/d, Fig. 95, directly recalling the defiance of Judgement noted in 'The Next War', Ex. 7, x, a). The final five-bar twelve-note proposition, concluding with a diminished triad ending on low F$^{\#}$ may be taken to indicate Britten's view of failure of God's law to prevent 'war' in the

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[70] Pears 1978:15.

[71] Evans 1979/96:462 and Cooke 1996:71 cite Webern.

[72] 'The End' was Owen's provisional title for 'an earlier homoerotic poem', finally entitled 'To Eros' (Owen 1990:84). Lines 5-6 deliberately refute Revelation 21:4 (Spear 1975:36–37). Britten's retention of capital letters designated to the Divine (Blunden edition) confirms that God is the focus of criticism.

[73] Roseberry (Reed 1995:254).

private domain. The composer's deliberate fragmentation of traditional Christian affirmation is strategically placed at a moment that will give rise to a most private 'Agnus Dei'.

20. 'AGNUS DEI'/'At a Calvary Near the Ancre': Britten's marriage of sacred and profane

Little needs to be added to the previous discussion of Owen's use of the term 'greater love' or Britten's discarding the overtly homoerotic 'Arms and the Boy' in favour of 'At a Calvary', except to note Britten's discrete handling of a subject approached more clearly in *Venice*. What emerges in the 'Agnus Dei' is Britten's most subtly eloquent passive–aggressive protest towards established religion yet achieved.[74]

It is here that one faces a real dilemma in one's response to Britten's art (perhaps no less to Owen's). At face value there is certainly a very strong appeal to any attack on religious hypocrisy. This much, after-all, is Christ-like.[75] Owen's inversion, that those 'flesh-marked by the beast' are priests serving a political agenda, implies that politicised Christianity has itself become the persecuting force in the hands of the State, 'by whom the gentle Christ's denied'.[76]

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[74] '[The significance of 'Agnus Dei'] is still insufficiently realized.' Mitchell (Cooke 1999:208).
[75] Cf. Matt. 7:1–6, 'You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye' (i.e. one is to judge, as v. 6 reiterates, but not as a hypocrite), and Matt. 23. Britten addresses religious hypocrisy again in *Cantata Misericordium* (The Parable of the Good Samaritan), composed in the immediate aftermath of *War Requiem* for tenor and baritone soloists.
[76] This harmonizes with the most conservative interpretation of the book of Revelation, to which Owen's poem refers. In this view 'The Beast out of the Sea' (13:1–10, i.e. the Roman State) is given power by the 'Dragon' (13:2) who is identified as Satan (12:9), sustaining 'The Beast out of the Earth' (13:11–18, i.e. a self-serving politicised religion which persecutes the

These poetic concepts, with their clear Biblical ambiance, are complex in their relationship to Britten's setting. The music, like the boys' earlier 'Te decet', pivots around C-F$^{\#}$, no longer a *diabolus* bell-tritone, but a linear, sinuous string ground which is subsequently voiced by the choir 'Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona *eis* requiem' ('Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant *them* rest'). *Them* is contrasted with Britten's non-liturgical alteration 'Dona *nobis* pacem' ('Grant *us* peace') for the tenor soloist, originally Pears who apparently suggested the non-liturgical alteration (from 'requiem sempiternam').

This unique moment in *War Requiem,* merging the Latin into the vernacular field of the Owen setting, anticipates the musical (but not textual) merging of performing forces at the end of the work. The re-emergence of the 'Dona nobis pacem' phrase on the oboe in 'Strange Meeting' is significant in relation to the spiritual dilemma Britten confronts in 'Agnus Dei'.

The rotation of the tritone around the scalic ground yields a predominant b minor alternating with its Neapolitan sixth – in other words the flat-sixth falling to the fifth expressive appoggiatura of *Grimes* and Agony Motive of *Budd* (Exs. 2, vii, a–b, and 4, iii, a–f). In relation to Britten' *oeuvre* his use of passacaglia form in such a strikingly personal movement raises a profound ambiguity: it symbolizes death, either parodied or real.[77]

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true Church, the cultural context the original recipients of the letter of Revelation). Britten set Rev. 12:9 as 'War in Heaven'.

[77] *Bunyan* (II.1, 23, variously Figs. 12–17); *Grimes* (Interlude IV); *Lucretia* (II.2, Figs. 95–102); *Herring* (III, Figs. 51–59); *The Little Sweep* (XII, to Fig. 43[15]); *Budd* (I.3, Fig. [9]124 to end); *Gloriana* (III.3, *1*); *Screw* (II.VIII, Figs. 121–31); *Noye* ('Storm', Figs. 67–86, 87–93); *Curlew* (Figs. 69–70); *Wingrave* (Interlude III *et. seq.*); *Venice* (II.9, Fig. 211 *et seq.*).

21. 'LIBERA ME'/'Strange Meeting': absolution or consolation?

The headlong rush into the g minor catastrophe engendered by 'Libera me', the moment of absolution in the *Requiem* rite, is fully contrasted by the 'music on the edge of silence' which is Britten's setting of Owen's 'Strange Meeting'. This state of affairs casts a retroactive question mark over the palpable closure of the private domain in the previous $F^{\#}$ major triad of 'Agnus Dei'.

Shelley's 'Queen Mab' is a source behind Owen's 'Strange Meeting', and is the actual poem Britten's Owen Wingrave reads in Hyde Park (James' Owen reads Goethe). Britten had also set a reference to 'Queen Mab' in Rimbaud's 'Villes' (*Les Illumination*).[78] Shelley's poem has been recognized as 'an attack on established religion.'[79]

Britten's editing of Owen's location of 'Strange Meeting' in Hell does not remove the heavy hints of that condition in the prevalence of g minor in the setting.[80] The edit recalls that of Grimes' original 'To hell then! And God have mercy upon me!' although Claggart makes clear 'There I found peace of a sort, there I established an order such as reigns in Hell'. Claggart-like melodic fourths in the baritone line, related back to the fourths of 'sad shires' and 'drawing down of blinds' ('Anthem') and the 'breaking of earth's sleep'

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[78] Lines from 'Queen Mab' in Britten's hand occur in the drafts of *Coal Face* (1935). Reed (Cooke 1999:59).
[79] Bächman 1979:109.
[80] Rupprecht 2001:327, fn. 49.

('Futility') suggest a resignation to fate (cf. also the *Screw* Theme and the *Furnace*'s Nebuchadnezzar–Babylon–Benedicite).[81]

Resignation rather than affirmation is underpinned both by the melodic C–F$^{\#}$ at the tenor's 'Strange friend' and the oboe's reprise of the 'Dona nobis pacem' shape at the baritone's lament at the loss of 'the undone years' in response to the tenor's 'here is no cause to mourn':

> As the tenor addresses the enemy he has killed, the *Requiem*'s principal tonal elements are encapsulated in a single bar, the words 'Strange friend' set to the same tritone which here suggests the paradox of companionship between hunter and hunted.[82]

(The private idea behind 'hunter and hunted' and 'paradox of companionship' will be clarified in *Venice*, where the tenor again becomes the 'hunter' only to be 'hunted' in a Britten theme extending back at least to *Our Hunting Fathers*.)

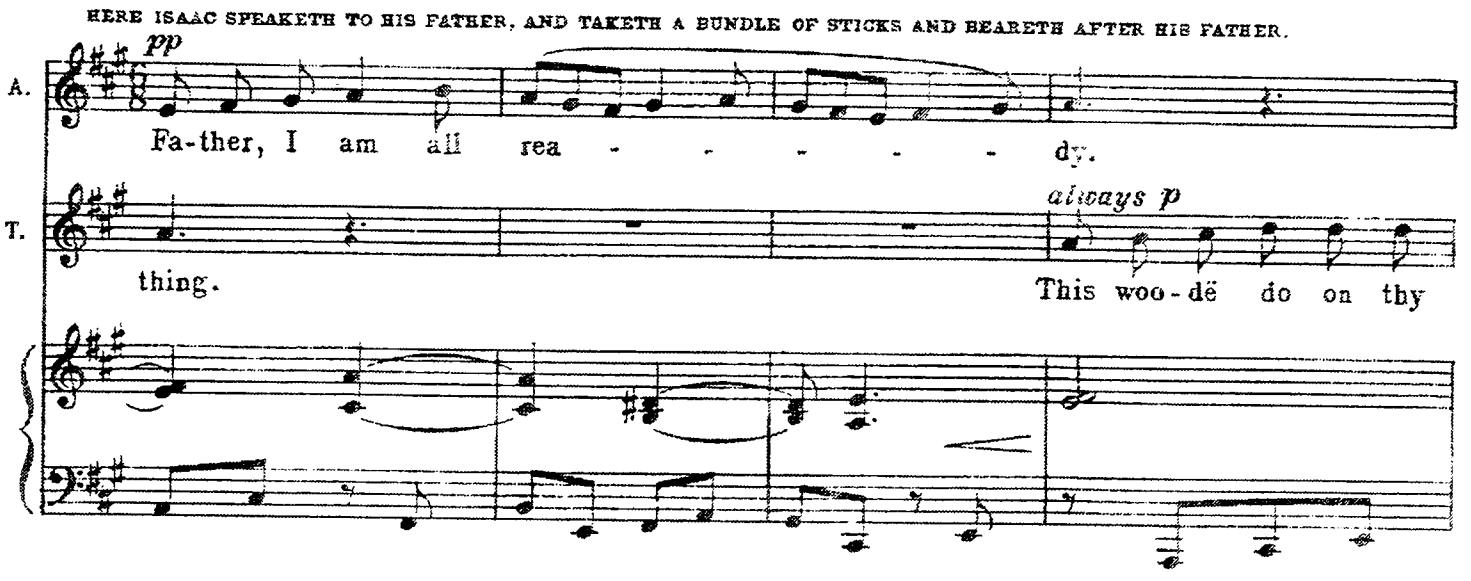
C–F$^{\#}$ is further treated as part of V^{7} in g minor at 'Then, as I probed them', a further 'rationalising' of the *diabolus* harmonic form. The pessimism expressed towards civilization is palpable (cf. *Grimes* and *Budd*) and the naked conjunction of the linear form of the *diabolus* bell-tritone with the musical shape of the Latin phrase at the conclusion is telling. Britten's personal appeal in *War Requiem* is not for the acceptance of the unregenerate sinner by society (e.g. *Grimes*), but is specifically drawn against the fusion of religious ideas. Britten is expressly seeking a religious benediction in musical terms – or expressing doubt in its possibility (a kind of 'grieving' in itself).

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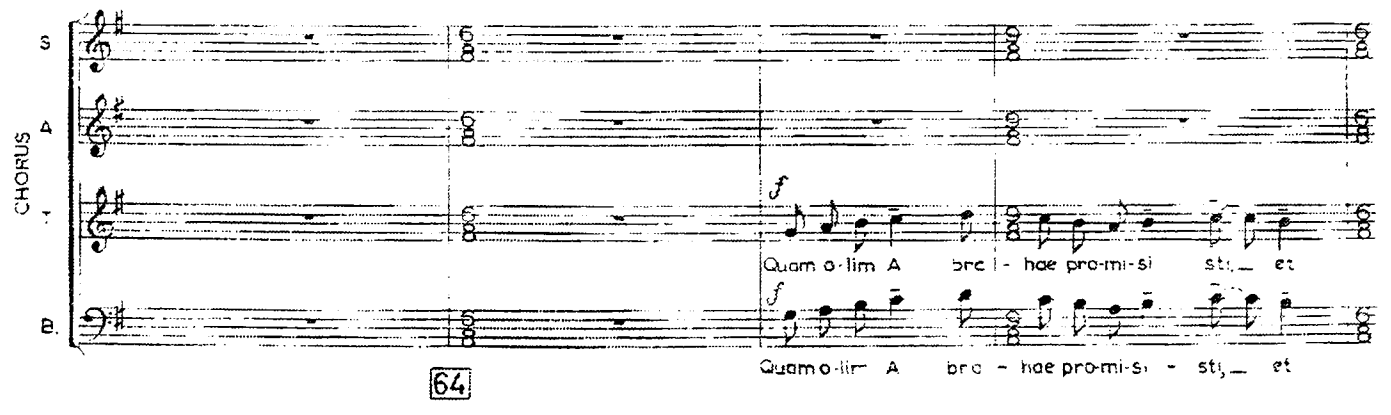
[81] Cooke 1996:75–76.
[82] *Ibid.*:75.

'In paradisum' is a transformation of the fugue subject 'quam olim Abrahae' – itself derived from the Canticle II phrase 'Father I [Isaac] am already' as Isaac unwittingly proceeds with Abraham to his self-sacrifice which, in the 'Offertorium' Owen parody, actually takes place. This joint derivation of the phrase from Canticle II and the 'Offertorium' parody is disturbing in the ambivalence of its implication beyond death: will the protagonists be sacrificed in eternal death or not:

Ex. 7, xii, a. Canticle II: *Abraham and Isaac*



Ex. 7, xii, b. *War Requiem*, 'Offertorium', fugue subject





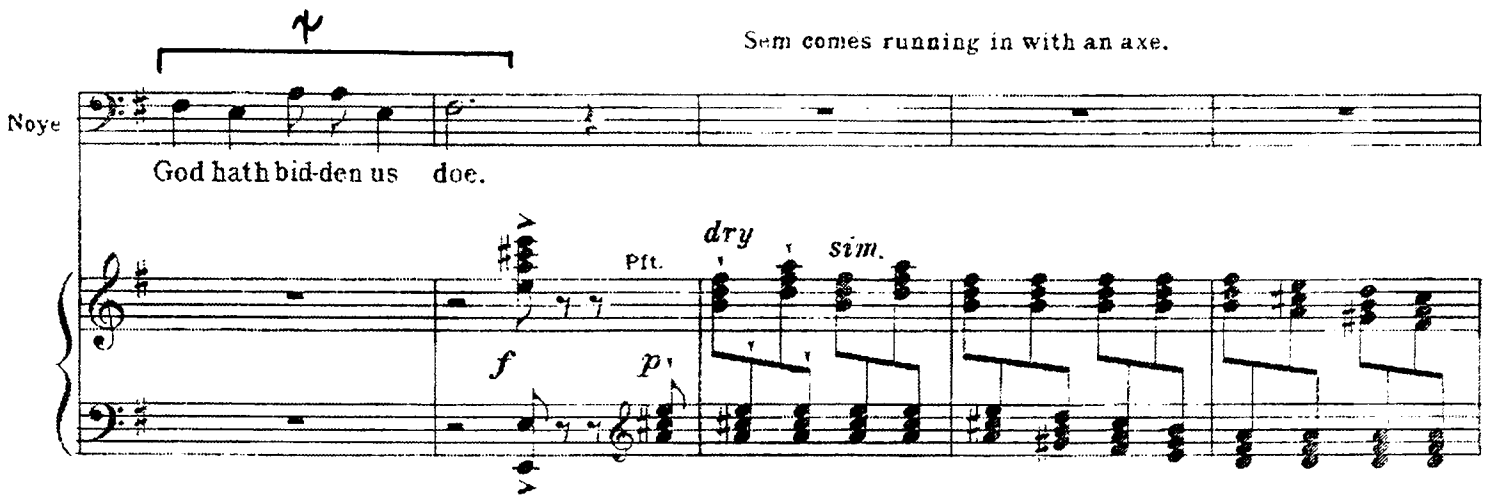
Ex. 7, xii, c. *War Requiem*, 'In paradisum'



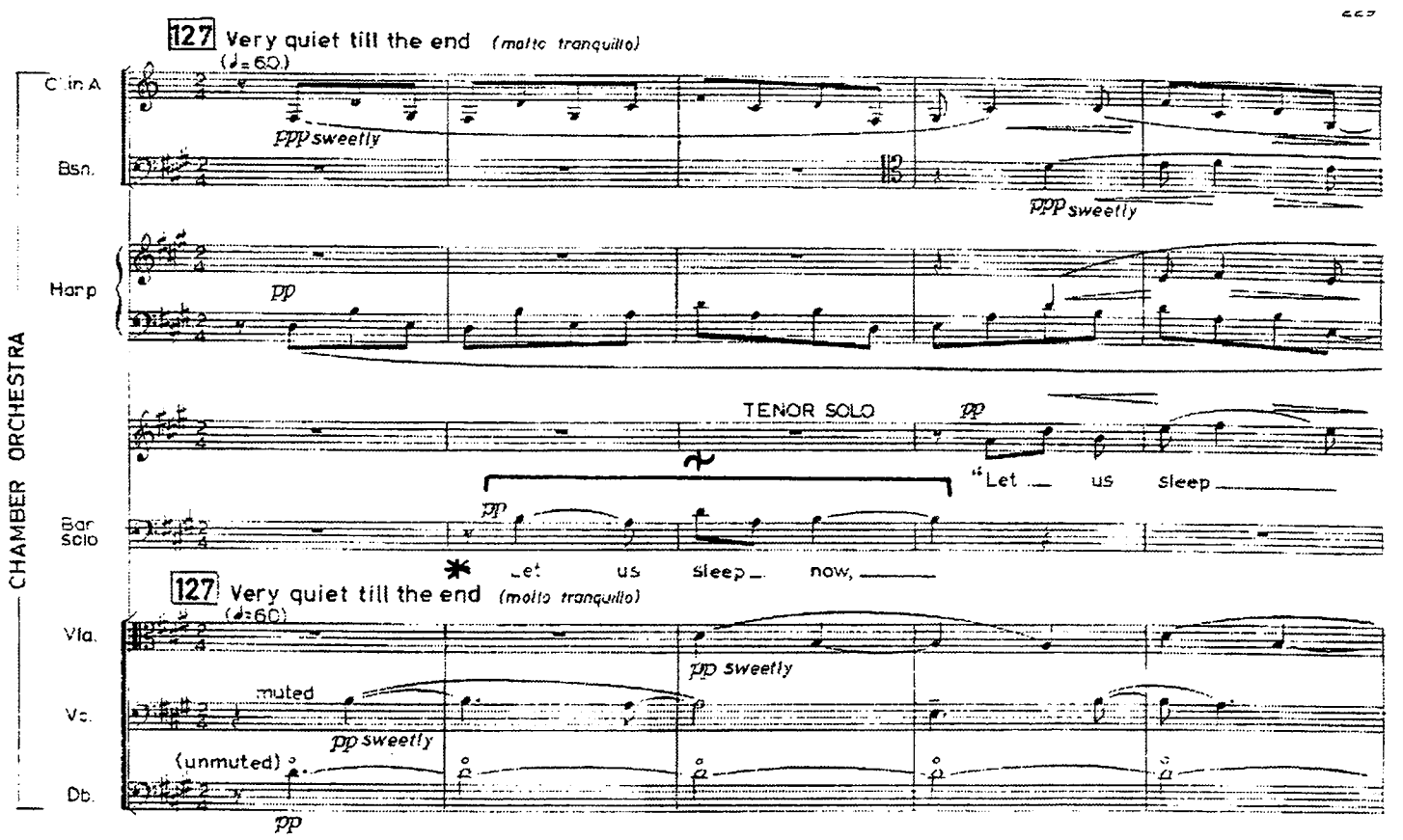
'Let us sleep now' – itself a textual reference back to the 'sleep' of 'Bugles Sang' and 'Futility' – is derived from the musical phrase 'As God hath bidden us doe' in *Noye*. The possible implication that Britten is suggesting that God has 'fated' man to be unrepentantly sinful is in tension with the

Biblical paradigm, and this situation would explain the troubled ending of the work after the apparent benediction of 'In paradisum'/'Let us sleep now':

Ex. 7, xiii, a. *Noye's Fludde*



Ex. 7, xiii, b. *War Requiem*, 'Let us sleep now'



* Treated heterophonically

The sudden punctuations of the bell-tritone and return of 'Requiem aeternam' re-exposes the metaphysical dualism as a closing question mark. (Contrast

with the F# major 'bell-scene' at the end of the *Dream*, III, Figs. 99-101, where fairies gentle, nature-based benediction of 'peace' and 'rest' on the bed-chambers of the sleeping lovers sounds affirmative.[83]) Related to the huge initial public success of *War Requiem*, observations such as 'I think [Britten] felt the easy success was an outrage and an invasion of privacy' can best be understood in the context of the present reading.[84]

Britten's preservation of the 'judgement rhetoric' of his previous operas in such techniques betokens unresolved guilt: the guilt of war and the guilt of sexual immorality radiate outwardly and inwardly. This simultaneous affirmation and subversion of notions of 'benediction', points to Britten's turning away from 'opera' in the aftermath of *War Requiem*. The 'rites of passage' of the Church Parable genre indicates the search for a renewed spiritual aesthetic. This would lead to the secular benediction of his final opera, *Venice*, via the 'television opera' *Wingrave*.

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[83] Cf. the F# major *Screw* 'bell-scene' (II.2).

[84] Harewood 1981:148 endorsed Mitchell (Mitchell–Reed 1991:53).

Chapter 8. *CURLEW RIVER*: the parable genre: Christian confrontation at close quarters

1. An introduction to *Curlew River* and the Parable genre

While in Japan during his Far East tour with Pears in 1956, Britten experienced two performances of the Nō drama *Sumidagawa* ('Sumida River') inspiring the creation eight years later of *Curlew River*.[1] The experience contributed to the birth of a new 'Parable for Church performance' genre, subsequently generating *The Burning Fiery Furnace* (1966) and *The Prodigal Son* (1968). The key to this phenomenon lay in Britten's critical decision in 1959 to 'Christianise' *Sumidagawa*, with his librettist William Plomer:[2]

> When I saw the play, *Sumidagawa*, the story of the mother looking for her lost child, I immediately felt that not only was it a wonderful story which had great importance for us in the West as Christians, but also that the actual form in which the emotions were conveyed could be most useful and something we opera composers could surely learn from. So the first church opera that I wrote, which was in a style that I only recently evolved, was an Anglicisation of this *Sumidagawa*, Sumida River, which we then called *Curlew River* and translated it, in every sense of the word, into East Anglian – the part of England where I live.[3]

The geographical relocation is notable, being part of a process that had already been applied to *Albert Herring*, *The Little Sweep*, and the Norwich scene in *Gloriana* (from Neale). Also, a performance of Holst's *Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda* at the 1960 Aldeburgh Festival ran into complications when

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[1] In one performance of *Sumidagawa* the boy's spirit actually appeared at the end. Plomer chose this ending for *Curlew* when Britten gave him the option (Cooke 1998:141).
[2] Britten (in Cooke 1998:142–43).
[3] Britten (*OC*) 1967:15.

the vicar of Aldeburgh Parish Church insisted that the references to pagan religions and deities be Christianised in order for the performance to go ahead.[4] This may indicate an issue Britten pre-empted by Christianising his parable. What is clear is that the Buddhist references had, up to 1959 (i.e. for three years), been willingly retained by Britten, in spite of his late desire for the 'Christianisation' in personal not practical terms.[5] The incorporation of the Christian element would clearly introduce the kind of spiritual tension Britten had formerly required of his dramaturgies.

Financial pressures on the Aldeburgh Festival and limited performance venues, combined with the artistic and financial success of *Noye* which, like the successive Parables, received its premiere in Orford Church, contributed to a need to place a small-scale opera in a local church setting:

> People express curiosity about the fact that my most recent pieces for the English Opera Group have been a trilogy of short operas for church performance. Actually, this has been a quite natural development. Many English towns lack any auditorium as suitable as their church. There was great activity in restoring churches during the nineteenth century, and the church is the basic building in every town and village. The west end of the church is usually suitable for performances. These buildings were the centre of local life – rather than the town hall, used for committees and assizes. What we are doing has not been done much since the Reformation: religious drama with music used to be common before then, and little plays were used during the Mass, but this was driven out during the Reformation.
>
> So the availability of churches has opened up new possibilities for the English Opera Group on tour. We can now perform in localities where otherwise we could not, and the needs of the production are relatively modest. We don't have to take much with us, in the external sense. The basic lighting is about all that has to be controlled, and there one aims for the daylight if possible and, if not, to approximate it as

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[4] Kildea (forthcoming). The author is grateful to Dr. Kildea for permission to cite this material from a lecture at Oxford in 1996.

[5] Britten (in Cooke 1998:142–43).

> closely as possible. I've learned an enormous amount from the Oriental theatre, especially the Nõ drama of Japan.[6]

The need to 'translate the work in every sense' was thus complemented by a need for a religious context suited to Church performance.

Such 'Christianising' produced the need for a new aesthetic that would enable integration between East and West and, perhaps more importantly, provide Britten with a new scenario upon which the role of kinds of 'difference' could be played out in a context for his own social/metaphysical agenda, thus bringing *Curlew* into line with the concerns of his other operas and *War Requiem*.

Another source of 'Christianisation' was the medieval liturgical drama *The Play of Daniel* produced by Noah Greenberg for New York Pro Musica:[7]

> Britten leaned forward intensely in his chair, peering at us from beginning to end with riveted attention, clearly fascinated by the entire thing.[8]

However, on 4 August Britten wrote to Plomer:

> I am much looking forward to starting on *Curlew River*. I'd love to talk about one or two bits fairly soon, but its thrilling that it is so beautifully and convincingly shaped now. By-the-way I saw the Play of Daniel (Latin-13th century play from Beavais [*sic.*]) the other day which was an object lesson in how not to do a medieval play [...] glorious, accurate scholarship, I know, every detail being perfectly copied visually and aurally, without any style or taste or genuine understanding – one of

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[6] Britten (*ON*) 1969:10.

[7] 27 July 1960, St Nicholas Chapel, Kings Lynn.

[8] Russell Oberlin (Interview, New York 1995). Oberlin stated that the entire play and not just his own contribution held Britten's attention. Afterwards, upon meeting the composer, Oberlin claims that Britten appeared delighted with the performance. Oberlin claimed it was 'absolutely right' in his mind to link the Pro Musica production with Britten's parables, as, upon seeing *Curlew* several years later, he instantly felt it was informed of an identical spirit, and that Britten had taken the processionals, style and instrumentation of the Greenberg version and made them his own.

> the most hideous hours I've ever spent. We must think very carefully about the look of our thing.[9]

Plomer replied:

> I was much interested in your adverse view of the *Play of Daniel*, and feel sure I would have agreed exactly with you. It sounds as if the production lacked that touch of strangeness, that odd mixture of the sinister and the naive which (to my mind) is the prevalent flavour in medieval.[10]

Daniel is a late play, written during the demise of the liturgical dramatic convention: liturgical drama had its origins in the late ninth and tenth centuries, stemming from compositional and ceremonial (*ordo*, lit. 'order') decorations and interpolations to the 'Introit' and other liturgical items mainly connected to ceremonial processions. From there it evolved into the tropes of the more significant major Feast days, in particular the Easter liturgies, although on the whole the style of dramatic representation was deliberately restricted so as to be hardly distinguishable from the ceremony (*officium*) to which it was attached.

By the fourteenth century, depending on the degree of regional flexibility, liturgical drama reached its final stage of development as full-blown *ludus* or 'play', most examples of which intentionally border on full theatrical parody. It became increasingly difficult to retain the aesthetic sense

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[9] Unpublished (Britten–Pears Library).

[10] Unpublished, 3 Sept. 1960 (Britten–Pears Library). Plomer gives another clue to the connection between Daniel and the parable genre while Britten was composing *Curlew*: 'I can't find any derivation of John linked with Juventus, &c. Only the Hebrew Johannan (= "Jehovah has favoured")' (Unpublished, 2 Mar. 1964, Britten–Pears Library). The word *Juventus* occurs at the beginning of *Daniel*, and in that context it refers to the scholars or students of Beauvais who have 'composed' and presented the play in its twelfth-century form.

of worship over entertainment, although these developments were not unilaterally linear. In many regions liturgical drama would have developed little beyond minor expressive additions to ceremony, either through deliberate resistance to the importation of secular dramatic aesthetics in less conservative congregations elsewhere or simply by a shared sense of ceremonial verisimilitude.

Alongside these developments was a growing mistrust and antipathy of a majority of the clergy to questions of moral value and the aesthetic nature of the kinds of dramatic presentation. One of the inherent problems in liturgical drama was the depiction of pagan or evil elements without being detrimental to the Christian basis of the genre, a problem with particular bearing on Britten's *Prodigal*.

The Counter Reformation Council of Trent (1545-63) purged the liturgy of overtly dramatic elements. The public popularity of religious drama over ceremony, as well as resistance to clerical censorship, resulted in the transference of dramatic genres from the Church into the guilds and marketplaces of the towns and villages.[11] This gave rise to sacred vernacular play genres, with their overt fusion of sacred and profane, culminating in the various Miracle and Mystery cycles, themselves providing fertile ground for

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[11] The qualified generic parallels of 'high' liturgical drama with Japanese Nō play, and 'low' vernacular sacred play with Kabuki is striking. Britten was apparently quick to (intuitively) detect such *zeitgeist*, contributing to connections in the juxtaposition of East and West in the Parables.

the later development of Jacobean and Elizabethan drama quintessentialised in Shakespeare.[12]

Britten's parable genre owes much of its origin to this late liturgical dramatic type, exemplified by *Daniel*.

2. East meets West: a spiritual context for the late operas

An aesthetic conceit shared to differing degrees by both liturgical ceremonial and the Nō dramatic convention is the idea of movement and expression being 'repressed' or 'transformed' into stylised method. The liturgical derivation of this is rooted in the courtly conventions of Constantinople: the manner in which the Emperor was to be approached in state was translated into liturgical equivalents in the conduct of ceremonies before the throne of the new State god, ostensibly Jehovah.

Nō convention is bound up with highly evolved and ultimately inscrutable (because metaphysical) theories of the dramatic presentation of 'spirits' through stylisation designed to sublimate individual ego. A preparatory period of meditation is set-aside for the Buddhist monk performers. The principal character (*shite*) sits silently in the mirror room (*kagami-no-ma*) contemplating the relevant mask in order to 'possess' the character.[13]

Britten's understanding of such Christian and Japanese sources would have been gleaned respectively from Karl Young's *The Drama of the Medieval*

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[12] Wickham 1979:11–54; Smoldon 1981:245–55.
[13] Cooke 1998:130–37.

Church, and discussions – especially in Japan – and general reading about Japanese classical drama.[14] Plomer's own knowledge and experience of Nō would also have proved invaluable:[15]

> I am reading some fascinating passages from Zeami about Noh. For instance:
>
> > 'Sometimes spectators of the Noh say that the moments of "no action" are the most enjoyable. This is one of the actor's secret arts. Dancing and singing, movements on the stage, and the different types of miming are all acts performed by the body. Moments of "no action" occur in between. When we examine why such moments without action are enjoyable, we find that it is due to the underlying spiritual strength of the actor which unremittingly holds the attention. He does not relax the tension when the dancing or singing comes to an end or at intervals between the dialogue & the different types of miming, but maintains an unwavering inner strength. This feeling of inner strength will faintly reveal itself and bring enjoyment. However, it is undesirable for the actor to permit this inner strength to become obvious to the audience. If it is obvious, it becomes an act, and is no longer "no action". The actions before & after a period of "no action" must be linked by entering the state of mindlessness in which the actor conceals from himself his own intent. The ability to move audiences depends, thus, on linking all the artistic powers with one mind.'
>
> I find this intensely interesting, & perhaps it is helpful in suggestion to you. When I come I will bring with me any book or books that may be of help to us in working towards the effect that you need & aim at.[16]

During the original parable productions, Britten insisted on a preparatory period of contemplation by the performers (*Curlew* was rehearsed over six

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[14] Britten obtained copies of Young's two-volume work in the 1951 reprint, which he heavily annotated (Britten–Pears Library, see App. 1). For a thorough account of Asiatic influences on Britten see Cooke 1998.

[15] Plomer 1975:179-89 and Alexander 1989:299–300 cite Plomer's earlier experience of Japanese Theatre and his recommendation of it to Britten prior to the 1956 tour.

[16] Unpublished, 27 July 1963 (Britten–Pears Library). The similarity with Meyerhold's theories of theatre and *commedia dell'arte* that influenced Stravinsky's conception of *Oedipus Rex*, a work that impressed Britten in the 1930s, is striking (Meyerhold 1969, also Walsh 1993:15).

weeks).[17] During rehearsals and early performances the choreographer Claude Chagrin was brought in to help the performers 'slow down':

> Before the procession started, it was Britten's practice to ask the entire cast to sit in silence for fifteen minutes, in order to prepare themselves for the drama.[18]

Britten's practical sensibility would have cautioned him against the luxury of a preparation period unless it had a specific connection with his own aesthetic intent.[19] Because the performers of *Curlew* are rarely, if ever, Buddhist priests or 'Christian' monks, the preparation period would have enabled them to 'possess' the aesthetic mindset and internal tempo Britten required, regardless of religious sensibility. This mirrors Britten's requirement of literal masks as media through which spiritual values and concerns may be projected, derived both from Nō and Classical Greek dramatic precedents.

Priestly 'masking' via the paraphernalia of liturgical costume rather than facial covering is also true of liturgical dramatic convention. This is

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[17] Bryan Drake (Interview, Aldeburgh 7 February 1994). Drake created the Traveller (*Curlew*), Astrologer (*Furnace*) and Elder Son (*Prodigal*). A Drake anecdote, highlighting Britten's seriousness about the preparation period, recounts the English Opera Group giving a series of performances of all three parables in a sequence over three consecutive evenings during an Australian tour (1970). Britten and Pears went on holiday for a few days, during performances at Bonython Hall during the Adelaide Festival. With Britten and Pears absent, the cast would take the preparation period less seriously and 'speed up the performances' under the guidance of Norman Knight, the flautist, who would check his watch under his habit and give various thumbs-up to the singers during the performance. Word got back to Britten who rebuked the cast on their return to Aldeburgh. Thereafter anyone found missing from the preparations or found speeding-up the performance would be said to have 'a touch of the Bonythons.' The author's suggestion of performing all three parables in a single evening to Simon Clugston of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (U.K.) prompted their 1997 touring production.

[18] Cecil Aronowitz, original violist in the parable productions, in Sanderson 1980:150. Drake claimed the preparation period was 'twenty minutes to half an hour'.

[19] Britten emphasized to Plomer his lack of desire to parody or create a pastiche of Nō and 'Japanesy music' (Cooke 1998:143).

referred to in the text of the first movement of one of Britten's earlier 'parables', the cantata *Saint Nicolas*:

> CHORUS
> Our eyes are blinded by the holiness you bear.
> The bishop's robe, the mitre and the cross of gold
> Obscure the simple man within the Saint.
> Strip off your glory, Nicolas, and speak!

The dualistic implication of 'Saint–simple man' and the connection of the 'Saint' with 'holiness' 'glory' and the paraphernalia of presentation as opposed to simple manliness is significant in Britten's work as has been discussed (i.e. the public aspect is embodied in clothing and outward appearance connected with 'ritual', a point that extends to the regal garb of Queen Elizabeth in *Gloriana* as to the militaristic paraphernalia of the *Wingrave* family and Aschenbach's trappings of 'respectability' in *Venice*). That Britten's social-humanist rather than religious use of parable forms is not simply 'passive' but also 'aggressive' was famously defined in his Aspen speech in a phrase that echoes Auden's creative use of parable genres as a means to teach society to 'unlearn hatred and learn love':

> And I can find nothing wrong with the objectives – declared or implicit [...] with offering to my fellow-men music which may inspire them or comfort them, which may touch them or entertain them, even educate them – directly and with intention. On the contrary, it is the composer's duty, as a member of society, to speak to or for his fellow human beings.[20]

These statements are connected with a didactic streak in Britten's art, recalling his response to sermons in his childhood/early manhood

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[20] Britten 1964/78:12. Also Mitchell 1987:21 who discusses Auden's didactic influence in this respect and the idea of 'parable art'.

(cf. Plomer's draft libretto annotation at the end of *Curlew*, '?Abbot winding up – a little preachment').[21] His own comments ('the element of the preacher is what makes Auden very valuable') and those of others (e.g. Forster's negative reaction to Britten's 'over-intense Christianity'), combined with Britten's desire for audience participation in the hymns and songs in works like *Saint Nicolas*, *The Little Sweep* and *Noye's Fludde*, amplify these impressions, as does the quasi-propaganda tone of *War Requiem*, *Voices of Today* and *Wingrave*. However it is a central assertion of the present thesis that only in *Venice*, Britten's last opera, does he disclose the metaphysical bearings of this aspect of his work:[22]

> Britten's more fruitful way out [...] by relaxing, by easing off the tight tense area into a state of mind which in full consciousness can honour, and eventually glory in and die for, its devotion to its own 'sinful' predilections.[23]

The extent to which this 'honour', 'glory' and 'death', particularly relevant to *Wingrave*, are emancipated from guilt is less clear than this makes it seem (i.e. in *Venice* 'guilty innocence' is finally revealed as 'guilty guilt' from a Christian perspective, leaving any possible claim for redemption in instrumental musical terms alone).

That Britten's 'redemptive system' is ultimately shown to be music as an end in itself, drawing strength from Classical paradigms rather than any Christian 'mask', explicates Britten's final 're-translation' of Parable genre

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[21] Cooke 1998:146.
[22] Cf. Evans 1979/96:547.
[23] Holloway (Palmer 1984:224).

techniques into the domain of the 'profane'. (*Curlew* and *Prodigal* were actually composed in Venice.)[24]

In view of the late operas, by taking his parables for performance into the Church after *War Requiem* Britten seems to demonstrate to himself as much as to his listening audience the extent to which 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it, and suffers' (cf. Claggart in *Budd*). Indeed the 'exorcism' of specific Christian texts and subjects in *Wingrave* and *Venice*, refocusing purely on music as an intrinsically limited 'grace', is arrived at by his translation of parable techniques. By the time of *Prodigal*, the only parable of the sequence based on a *bona fide* Biblical parable – *Furnace* being an Old Testament narrative – one may feel that the point of Britten's musical 'emptiness' regarding concrete Christian ideas and doctrines has been reached.[25] In retrospect, this opened the way for *Wingrave*, which is as anti-*Prodigal* (and anti-Parable in general, at the face-value 'Christian' level) as can reasonably be imagined.[26] The literal inversion of the *Prodigal* in *Venice* would be the outcome.

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[24] It is additionally interesting that in Britten's late choral cycle *Sacred and Profane* it is the profane that has the last word.

[25] 'Emptiness' is Holloway's word (1977:6). 'In the end what Britten can and cannot do are equally conductive to the resulting music', Holloway (Palmer 1984:225).

[26] Of course it is quite possible for one to receive the parables, or *Noye* or any other Britten work, as 'Christian' for one's own purposes.

3. Britten's *Curlew*: tragedy versus affirmation

One of *Curlew*'s first critics felt it:

> Flawed by what seems to me a confusion as to its true aims. [...] [Britten and Plomer] have contrived to Christianise what is fundamentally a story with no Christian implications at all. [...] The dramatic emphasis remains [...] on the mother's anguish and the pathos of the boy's fate. [...] *Curlew River* is composed [...] out of Britten's most permanent obsession – innocence and its destruction. Nor is it any worse for that: in fact it is that which gives it its hypnotic power. But it does set up a certain tension with the medieval/Christian/liturgical framework that seems in the end to weaken its impact.[27]

It is the purpose of the present chapter to investigate the dramaturgy of *Curlew* in order to attempt to understand at what level the subject and themes of Christianity have a role in the work and the later parables, and what the nature of that role is.

a. The Structure: juxtaposing non-Christian and Christian

One of the automatic inheritances from Nō, on a structural level, is the concept of *jo-ha-kyū*, as Plomer indicated to Britten:

> I send you two extracts from a translation of a book called *Zeami and his Theories on Noh*. I think *A* may be of interest to you. [...]
> [*A*]
> The Noh usually has a tripartite course of progression: introduction, development & climax. It is a division ruling the speed for different parts of the play. The introduction, being the start, does not go very fast, but it is not slow either. [...]
> The next stage, development, is the part where, the speed being slowed down, the details of a play are elaborately presented. In the last part, called 'rapid' in Japanese, the play hurries to the conclusion. As a rule, the second stage development is separated into three sub-divisions, making the play five-fold.[28]

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[27] Noble 1964:667–68; Cooke 1998:251–52.

[28] Unpublished, 27 July 1963 (Britten–Pears Library).

Colin Graham, Britten's producer, later wrote of *Furnace* that 'The same triptych form [as *Curlew*] is there.'[29] Nō-like dramatic conventions are blended with liturgically inspired processions by the actors dressed as monks through the aisle of the Church building.[30] A robing ceremony is conducted on-stage, unlike Nō, inspired by Britten's and Graham's observation of priests robing before celebrating Mass in Venice.[31]

In a parallel to Nō convention, Britten's integration of two plainsongs, 'Te lucis ante terminum' (used to open and close *Curlew*) and 'Custodés hominum' suggests a tri-partite structure based on liturgical items (i.e. frame–drama–frame). Both plainsongs typically contain a concluding doxology referring to the Trinity. In the third and final stanza of 'Te lucis', the Three Persons are called upon by name in a doxology that sets the course of the drama. In 'Custodés hominum' the word 'Trinity' is heard at the climactic moment of the drama, the first time the voice of the boy's spirit is heard singing (Fig. 90), and marks the beginning of the healing process that will apparently restore the sanity of the Mother.

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[29] Herbert 1979/89:49.

[30] This is more proper to the Kabuki convention of entering down the centre aisle 'flower way' (*hanamichi* , Cooke 1998:155).

[31] Jan. to Feb. 1964, San Giorgio Maggiore, during the planning and composition of both score and dramatic conventions. Graham (Herbert 1979:48). As with Nō, priestly robing is usually conducted out of sight. There was a Nō-like ramp entrance to the original Parable stage, first used at the Madwoman's entrance (see Graham 1983). 'There is a distinction between the church space in general (and use of aisle for procession/recession) and the specific acting area, which might be linked to [...] distanciation. Does Britten distance us from the performing area (hence from the parable), or does he also distance us from the Abbot etc.? There must be some element of the audience being sucked into the sanctity of the performance venue, as supposedly in Nō (at least in medieval times).' (Cooke, communication with author, 2003.)

However, any attempt to rationalize the tri-partite structure of *Curlew* as a 'Trinitarian' statement or affirmation must be offset by Britten's apparent lack of belief in the doctrine.[32] The fusion with the tripartite structure of Nō is the aesthetic clue here and recalls the tripartite precedents of the three performing forces in *War Requiem* and three dramatic levels of the *Dream* (Fairies, Mortals, Rustics). By integrating plainsong Britten is able to affect a radical departure from the bleak conclusion of *Sumidagawa*. However the 'affirmative' *dénouement* of *Curlew* is simultaneously questioned at the musical level of Britten's symbolic economy.[33]

b. Liturgical dramatic sources: *Curlew River* as 'proto-opera'

Taken as a whole, the parable genre borrows from four distinct types of drama: from Japan, Nō and Kabuki; and from England the medieval liturgical drama and vernacular religious play as well as its natural roots in the western operatic tradition including Britten's own voice. Obviously *Curlew* retains its connection with Nō due to its 'Christianised' textual roots in *Sumidagawa* and Britten's orientally derived musical techniques.[34] However Young's *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (1933), which is exclusively concerned with liturgical dramatic genres, had a profound impact on the dramatic levels of

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[32] App. 2.

[33] We do not take into account here the common mis-understanding of the difference between physical and mental 'healing' and the salvation of the soul in Christian terms, the two not being necessarily mutually inclusive. In this sense the Abbot's 'sign of God's grace' that opens and closes *Curlew* may be applicable to the kind of 'temporary salvation' outlined for Vere in *Budd* (Pears creating both Vere and Madwoman roles).

[34] Malm 1986:151–213; Cooke 1998:130–89.

the 'Christianisation' of the parable genre. (A survey of App. 1 demonstrates the relevance of Britten's study of Young to the dramaturgy of *Noye* as well as the 'tighter' forms of the three parables.)

It is clear from Britten's research that his knowledge of the kinds of liturgical dramatic genre used by the Medieval Church (e.g. distinctions between the more formal 'ceremony/*officium*' and the looser 'play/*ludus*', e.g. *The Play of Daniel*) and the conventions of their presentation (see App. 1) was at least as equal as his awareness of Japanese dramatic genres.[35] It may well be that Britten's desire to 'medievalise' the Parable genre, more rigorously than *Noye*, may reflect a desire to engage with a specific historical period (i.e. pre-Enlightenment) that would relate to the 'innocence' that so fascinated him, a possibility that may have extended to the uncompleted Nativity Cycle based on the Chester Plays he was planning at the end of his life. This aspect parallels the distinction between modality and chromaticism as signs of 'nescience' and 'experience' a point of great relevance to *Wingrave* and *Venice*.[36] Certainly Britten's 'medievalisation' engages with the 'Christian' period before the creation and emergence of 'Classical' opera, and in this respect *Curlew* can be considered a work that 'outwardly, at least, is bound up with the prehistory of musical theatre.'[37]

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[35] Cooke 1998:162–65 addresses this in considerable depth.

[36] 'As the [Parable] story unwinds, its crises are sympathetically caught in ever more tortuous distortions; as it comes out well, so alien notes are restored to normal; and thus the rebirth of nescience is woven into the actual sounds themselves, providing the very reason for the notes being the way they are'. Holloway (Palmer 1984:226).

[37] Mitchell 1963/93:151.

Plomer himself indicated the degree to which Britten's original suggestion of 'Christianising' *Curlew* had fired his imagination:

> I don't know if you have thought any more about the problem of the title. I am still inclined to hope for something about the woman (i.e. 'The woman on-or-at the Ferry' or something of that sort) partly because it seems to me that, besides being the central person, or Shite (!), the woman is, in a way, analogous to the Madonna mourning her Son.[38]

The resurrection idea in the work, introduced by Britten at a very late stage almost as an after-thought, is linked to Easter and the corresponding *planctus* or liturgical dramatic lament tradition focusing on Mary's lamentation over the death of her Son (cf. Britten's specific note at the end of the score: 'Venice–Aldeburgh, Maundy Thursday, 1964'). Britten's use of Young highlights such liturgical connections, whatever his ultimate aesthetic purposes. The following touches on the most significant of these.

The Casting of Boys

The tradition of Britten's casting of boys in religious contexts extends back through *Noye* to 'The Pickled Boys' in *Saint Nicolas*. In the parable convention, boys generally play acolytes. Individual boys play the 'Spirit' (*Curlew*), the Cabaret players and Angel in the fire scene (*Furnace*), and the Temptations and the stage-band in the vernacular setting of the 'Cantate Domino' (*Prodigal*).

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[38] Unpublished, 28 Sept. 1963 (Britten–Pears Library). It is even possible that Plomer's suggestion here resonated in Britten's mind as he struggled to write the *dénouement* at a very late stage.

The most interesting references for the present line of investigation are those linking the casting of boys with characters of great weight and significance. For example there are references to boys playing angels.[39] At one point Young notes a boy who played the archangel Gabriel, being carried into the church building on a chair.[40] In a certain Easter drama, the Marys are played by boys', without impersonation.[41] Young also refers to the Marys having 'acolyte assistants.'[42] In a reference connected with the 'Feast of Fools' he refers to the election of a 'Boy Bishop' who assumes the highest ecclesiastical responsibilities, flouts his elders, and introduces as much levity as the community will allow.[43]

The idea of boys playing prominent figures is a common convention found in Nō drama where it was expedient to 'symbolise' figures of eminence in a way that would not diminish their significance, as might happen if the role was taken by an adult. These *kōkata* (lit: 'child actor') would be called upon to symbolize Emperors or perhaps a famous Shōgun (lit: 'feudal overlord').

To carry the implications of this convention over into *Curlew*, it is possible that Britten understood the suggestion of the appearance of the Boy Spirit as a vision of Christ, emphasized by the use of the crucifix as a stage prop (in turn part-derived from the symbolism of the burial mound in

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[39] Young, I, 1933/51:244, 'Boys and Angels'.
[40] *Ibid.*:250, 'Carrying a boy (Gabriel)'.
[41] *Ibid.*:306, 'Boys playing Marys'.
[42] *Ibid.*:252, 'Costumes, gestures'.
[43] *Ibid.*:104–6, 'Clerical revels-parodies'.

Sumidagawa). The connection between 'Madwoman–Mary', 'Boy Spirit–Christ' had been made by Plomer, as previously discussed. But it is the convention of using a boy in the symbolic portrayal of the vision that links this type of casting both with the Nō and liturgical dramatic tradition. The same convention would apply to the use of the boy as an angel in the fire scene of *Furnace*.

The Stolen Boy Play

Before leaving the immediate connection between liturgical drama and *Curlew*, a mark Britten makes in Young concerns a rare play called *Filius Getronius* or *The Son of Getron*, contained in the category of plays appropriate to the Feast of St. Nicholas:

> It recounts the abduction of the Christian lad, Deodatus [*sic*.], his captivity among the heathen enemies, and his restoration to his parents through the miraculous power of the benevolent saint.[44]

This description matches 'The Pickled Boys' (*St. Nicolas*), encapsulating the essence of *Curlew*, as do the following quotations from Young:

> Meanwhile [...] Euphrosina [the mother] is lamenting the loss of her son, while the women try in vain to console her. [...] At their suggestion she prays to St. Nicholas, reminding him of his previous miracles, and vowing to fast until the return of Adeodatus. [...] At the close of the action Euphrosina is embracing her son, and giving thanks to God. [...] [An influence] from other plays may be inferred for the lament of Euphrosina. Although the legend itself provides her with a sufficient expression of grief, the presence of the *consolatrices* [consolers] and the general form of their dialogue with Euphrosina seem to show that the writer has profited from his acquaintance with the scenes of Rachel in the 'Ordo Rachelis' [i.e. the *planctus*].[45]

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[44] Young, II, 1933/59:351 ff., 'Stolen Boy Play'.
[45] *Ibid*.:357–58–59 respectively.

Britten also marks a reference to the antiphon 'Copiose Caritatis', used at the end of the play.[46] Its liturgical context is the 'Magnificat' of the 'Second Vespers for St Nicholas' and the 'Benedicitus' of Lauds. There is no obvious evidence that Britten borrowed directly from this source, either textually or musically, but his specific identification of a liturgical drama with so much content in common with *Curlew* is notable.

Peter and John

The sections of Young marked by Britten related to these two characters, concerns the increased 'naturalism' that began to be introduced to certain later liturgical dramas. The extreme stylisation of Nō clearly concerned Britten when considering Western unfamiliarity with such modes of presentation. This is manifested in the copiously detailed and illustrated production notes to the parables, created by Graham in consultation with Britten. Even stricter *ordo/officium* modes of presentation within the Western liturgical tradition would 'freeze' the acting style of the parables into a ceremonial presentation rather than a dramatic play.

Although Nō offered little hope for a movement style beyond strictly controlled hieratic ritual, passages such as Young's reference to a 'limping gait' for the elderly Apostle Peter would constitute a legitimate increase in 'naturalistic' movement within liturgical dramatic conventions.[47] The degrees of naturalism in Britten's parable genre exceed those admitted in either Nō or

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[46] *Ibid.*:360, 'Stolen Boy Antiphon'.
[47] Young, I, 1933/51:330–31, '"Limping gait" for Peter'.

early liturgical drama. Although a ceremonial style is preserved, naturalism increases with each successive parable to a degree rationalized by later liturgical dramatic precedents which retain vestiges of the *ordo/officium* parameters, but filling it with a naturalism that strongly anticipates the vernacular sacred play and western operatic genres (e.g. *Daniel*). In these respects, Britten's three successive parables may be said to reflect the evolution of the liturgical dramatic tradition itself.

Costumes and Gestures

There is a verisimilitude between the nature of the presentation of liturgical drama and the appropriateness of dress (i.e. the more *ordo/officium* the context, the more ceremonial the dress; the more *ludus*-like, the more naturalistic). In certain late dramas, the degree of naturalism allowed in costume exceeded that of any other dramaturgical element. It may well be that this threshold, bordering on the incongruous, contributed to the increasing success of the vernacular sacred play genre. Such incongruity may also partly explain Britten's decision to use vernacular in the parables, and not to follow through with the use of Latin initiated by the various plainsong hymns.

It was not uncommon for late-period liturgical drama to contain vernacular. On the other hand, setting entire Latin texts had not hindered the communicative power of Stravinsky's opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex* (1927), a work very much admired by Britten (Pears sang in Stravinsky's recording of the work). This also applies to Britten's *Cantata Academica* (1959) and *Cantata*

Misericordium (1963), the latter being a 'dramatic' (but not acted) setting of a New Testament parable, and the Latin sections of *War Requiem* (1962). Britten's vernacular settings of the 'Benedicite' at the *dénouement* of *Furnace* and the 'Cantate Domino' at the *dénouement* of *Prodigal*, along with the latter's dance element, points to a dramatic debt from the vernacular sacred play tradition. (This may also be seen in the style of presentation of the *Prodigal*'s Tempter). 'Custodés hominum', at the *dénouement* of *Curlew* is set in the original Latin – although at one point it did seem to be Britten's intention that it would be in the vernacular and it is surprising in respect of his didactic bent that Britten retained the Stravinskian 'distancing' effect of Latin. (It is possible that Britten might have wished to 'distance' the Trinitarian reference in the text at this dramatic moment.)

Britten's toning down of the lavishness of Nō costume to the more simple style of that used in *Curlew* indicates a desire to temper the convention of costume by the influence of the liturgical rather than the elaborate Japanese dramatic model. A similar compromise in the use of masks may also be noted, although gravitating towards the Greek rather than liturgical dramatic aesthetics.

The example of stylised movement and gesture, as well as 'non-impersonation' derived from the liturgical mode of presentation, forms another uncanny link with the type of costume and gestural demands of Nō. This provided Britten with another western dramatic 'alibi', if he should want one, for the creation of his own novel movement style for the parable genre.

This was calculated in close consultation with Graham. Britten forbade Graham to see any live Nō production prior to the creation of the movement convention for *Curlew*.[48] The resultant style is significantly more flexible than Nō, involving more naturalism than would ever be permitted in the Japanese drama (unlike Kabuki to some extent), yet clearly more stylised and ritualistic than would be expected in Western vernacular religious drama and opera. The parable convention is, in its own way, Britten's 'realisation' of medieval ceremonial manners. This also applies to the costume convention. Both undergo significant development in the two later parables.

Exceptional examples of late liturgical drama may have informed Britten's and Graham's imaginations when it came to the more elaborate costumes, particularly those of Nebuchadnezzar (*Furnace*) and the Tempter (*Prodigal*). Britten's experience of Greenberg's production of *Daniel* in 1960 would have accentuated this relatively 'operatic' use of costume. The costume style for the spiritual and godly characters in the parable convention retains a plain simplicity redolent of early *ordo/officium* style, especially in contrast with later medieval clerical vestments, which could achieve higher levels of visual arabesque.

This use of very simple costumes by Britten (e.g. the use of medieval-style habits for the chorus of monks that perform the role of pilgrims in *Curlew*) may be partly derived from passages in Young that refer to 'disciples'

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[48] Cooke 1998:154.

wearing simple copes without any attempt at impersonation.[49] Also, in a passage redolent of Britten's use of corn belts to represent feudal servant-hood in *Prodigal*, Young refers to a *Peregrinus* (lit: 'stranger', a drama about Christ's post-resurrection appearance as a 'stranger' to two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13–35) in which the disciples are simply adorned with staff and purses as tokens of their status.[50] Young describes many versions of the Easter drama:

> The costumes were usually the ordinary vestments of the sacristy, often slightly rearranged and sometimes supplemented by realistic or symbolical objects, through an earnest effort toward accuracy of impersonation.[51]

Such use of symbolic objects is another technique reflected in the Nō. The Ferryman's pole in *Curlew* is one obvious example; compare also the 'star enclosed by an orb' carried constantly by Nebuchadnezzar, the 'imposing staff' carried by the Herald and the 'Cup, Bowl and Ewer' used to symbolize the Feast in *Furnace*. The Traveller (*Curlew*), Astrologer (*Furnace*), and Younger Son (*Prodigal*) use various staffs. A reference to a late-period drama prescribes the use of hats for the disciples, another convention shared by Nō and used extensively in all three parables.[52]

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[49] Young, I, 1933/51:460, 'Costumes'.
[50] *Ibid.*:463, 'Costumes and gestures'. The same reference describes how Christ is to wear an alb (a full-length white linen vestment with long sleeves) and amice (an oblong piece of white linen worn about the neck and shoulders). He carries a cross and goes about barefoot. 'Even the gestures of the actors are prescribed with some care.'
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Young, II:475–76, 'Costumes'.

It is typical of Britten's dramaturgical approach in the parable genre that various tensions and compromises are established between source-types so that nothing specifically Japanese or liturgically dramatic remains in either costumes or gestures in order that the 'hidden' borrowings add to an uncanny sense of proto-operatic wealth in overall design (cf. Britten's observation of a desirable 'strangeness' in the medieval style missing from the Greenberg *Daniel*). This is important in comprehending the difference of Britten's parable genre from both (Eastern) Japanese and (Western) liturgical dramatic traditions.

Staging

The staging of the parables was crucial for Britten, and he had a model of Graham's set design constantly at his side while composing the music (as was his custom). The specialized stage design was derived from Nō. However Britten's markings in Young on this subject again indicates that a greater merging of medieval dramatic sources may have occurred than has been previously acknowledged.

From its simple ceremonial beginnings the acting area (*platea*) of liturgical drama grew to occupy the front of the basilica increasing in scale until the whole frontal area was utilized. Britten notes in Young a *Peregrinus* with a considerable degree of naturalism, including accuracy of costume and, importantly, the representation of the shelter at Emmaus by some sort of

stage prop located in the *platea*.[53] Britten marks out a passage regarding a different *Peregrinus* worth quoting in full, not only because of its symbolic use of geographical locations – a convention replicated in the staging of the three Parables – but also for the realism of the supper scene, a passage of relevance to the representation of Nebuchadnezzar's Feast in *Furnace*:

> The shelter at Emmaus is provided with seats, and on the table are wine, an uncut loaf, and three thin wafers, or *nebulae*. The bringing of water for the washing of hands augments the realism of the supper scene. The person who performs this service is, no doubt, the forerunner of the comic innkeeper of the later plays in the vernacular.[54]

However, this increasing degree of use of geographical space led, perhaps inevitably, to the gradual erecting of special, separate stages or *sedes*. The first of these to interest Britten concerns a Nativity drama, the rubrics of which indicate that the dialogue between the Magi and Herod is conducted at a special *sedes* constructed for Herod 'perhaps near the choir screen.'[55]

A later reference relates how, in a *Play of the Conversion of St Paul*, one side of the *platea* is to represent Jerusalem with a special *sedes* for the high priest and a second for the young Saul. The other side of the *platea* represents Damascus, with two more platforms for Judas and the chief of the synagogue.[56] Similar geographic locations are approximated on the parable stage.

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[53] I:455, 'Mise en scène'.
[54] *Ibid.*:475–76, 'Costumes and props'.
[55] II:53, 'Mise en scène' (cf. also Britten's uncompleted Nativity cycle of 1976).
[56] *Ibid.*:223, 'Elaborate staging'.

In the same volume Britten marks out the *ordo* for the *Dramatic Office of the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* by the French nobleman Philippe de Mezières (1326-1405) who introduced it to the west on his return from travels to the Orient. This western transformation of an eastern ceremony may have held a special attraction for Britten given the nature of the parable genre, which may explain his extensive marking of it. The passages Britten notes are striking, and the range and variety the *ordo* must have offered, all legitimately contained within the definition of liturgical drama, are considerable (e.g. the colourful costumes for the depiction of Lucifer may have influenced those for the Tempter in Britten's *Prodigal*).[57]

Thus the use of a specially designed *sedes* by Graham for the three parables was not without strong precedent in liturgical drama. Lengthy processionals accompanied by hymns, some instrumental colour (though almost certainly not continuous), and strong characterization and colourful acting in an allegorical manner resonate within the parable convention.

In a simple set of references Britten marks out passages that may have suggested to him the representations of the hoisting of the ferry's sail in *Curlew* (for which there is no counterpart in *Sumidagawa*), the raising of the image of gold in *Furnace* and the rising of the Sun in *Prodigal*. Elevating an image of Christ through the roof in one reference represents the resurrection.[58] In another drama, a *tentorium* representing Mount Sinai was

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[57] *Ibid.*:242–43, 'Costuming' (in Latin) and 'Mise en scène' (Virgin Mary).
[58] I:484, 'Scenic Tricks'.

erected in mid-nave, with a 'speaking' image of Christ elevated through silk sheets (the voice obviously spoken from within).[59]

Summary

For present purposes we may deduce the following about Britten's understanding of liturgical dramatic genres from his study of Young.

1. They are almost always entirely in Latin.
2. They are entirely sung in the context of a liturgical celebration.
3. With a few (late) exceptions, the participants are entirely male.
4. They are accompanied by minimal instrumental support.
5. They conclude in an item connected to the liturgy (e.g. 'Te Deum' in *Daniel*), which is accompanied by organ unison and bells/chimes.[60]

In *Curlew*, Britten retains the use of Latin for the two hymns and Greek for the brief 'Kyrie eleison' sung during the river crossing (Fig. 65, a direct reference to the Mass Ordinary). By utilizing an original framing device in the form of an address by the Abbot, Britten can create the impression of praise in the form of a call to worship and adoration, continuing the theme of the hymn texts. His retention of an all-male cast in the liturgical dramatic context is a counterpoint to Nō and a justification for casting Pears in the role of the Madwoman.[61]

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[59] *Ibid.*:488.
[60] Smoldon 1980:75.
[61] Britten (Cooke 1998:143).

This approach gave added relevance to Britten's use of liturgical dramatic convention over that of the vernacular sacred play where the casting of women was more conventional (e.g. compare with *Noye*, where the vernacular sacred play tradition, including women, is the strongest Western model). Although the use of flute and percussion are common to Nō, the derivation of the pitches and timbre of the Japanese shō transferred to the organ are not, the shō being an instrument of the Gagaku orchestra.[62] Britten may have been misled into thinking that musical instruments were used to accompany liturgical drama (certainly the earliest kinds) through his experience of Greenberg's *Daniel*. Ironically, given Britten's comments about the 'glorious accurate scholarship' quoted above, Dr. Edmund Bowles, musical adviser to Greenberg's production, erroneously applied his specialist knowledge of the vernacular sacred play to the liturgical dramatic genre.[63] The convention of a concluding liturgical item was to have strong implications for the *dénouements* of all three parables. It is to these liturgical sources that we will now turn.

4. Liturgical materials in text and music

a. 'Te lucis ante terminum'

Britten marked 'Te lucis' in his school copy of the *Liber Usualis* after 1928 (see also Table 2 and Ex. 9, i, a). It is designated in the liturgy under the Canonical

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[62] Cooke 1998:127–28, 182–85.

[63] It is unlikely that Britten read Bowles's published articles, as he did not subscribe to the journals containing them. I am grateful for the help of Dr. Philip Reed for this information.

Hours as a hymn for Compline. Britten attended a performance of the liturgical drama *The Raising of Lazarus* at Coventry Cathedral in 1962 while he was preparing the premiere of *War Requiem*.[64] 'Te lucis' was used as a liturgical item in this production, and may have influenced Britten's decision to use it in *Curlew*. Plomer made a translation of the hymn:

> Before the close of the day we pray thee,
> Lord, creator of all things,
> Of thy mercy to watch over us and be our protector.
>
> Keep far from us all evil dreams
> And wicked spirits of the night: hold our foes at bay
> So that our bodies suffer not destruction.
>
> May God the blessed father be our guardian,
> And Jesus his only son, in all things like the father,
> Together with the Holy Ghost,
> That reigns throughout the ages.[65]

The prayer for deliverance is apposite given the plot. The plainsong is in the Aeolian mode on $F^{\#}$, and contains all of the intervals to be drawn upon by most of the later music.

b. 'Custodés Hominum'

When Britten considered the use of this hymn he initially requested a vernacular translation from Plomer, ultimately preferring to retain the Latin (unlike the *dénouements* of *Furnace* and *Prodigal*), thus strengthening the

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[64] The author is grateful to Professor Brian Trowell, who produced the drama, for this information. The author inspected the unpublished score.
[65] Unpublished (Britten–Pears Library). These verses vary from those used in *Grimes*.

liturgical dramatic background of the first parable. Britten seems to have first thought of the plainsong while composing the music in Venice.[66]

'Custodés' is listed in the *Liber Usualis* under 'Second Vespers of the Feast of Guardian Angels' (2 October) as Britten noted. The angelic references are appropriate to the dramatic theme of God's grace through Providence. Plomer again made a translation, as Britten was initially thinking of using the vernacular:

> We praise the holy guardian angels of mankind
> Whom our heavenly father has given us
> To watch over our feeble frames,
> Lest they fall into the power of our marauding enemies.
>
> For since the wicked angel has fallen from grace,
> Justly stopped of all the powers granted to him,
> He is ablaze with envy and tries to drive from the heavens
> All those whom God welcomes there.
>
> Come hither, thou guardian angel,
> Turn away from the realms entrusted to thee
> All ailments of the spirit and whatsoever
> Refuses peace to the inhabitants.
>
> Let all praise, therefore, be continually
> To the Blessed Trinity,
> By whose endless power the threefold rule is fashioned,
> Whose glory holds sway throughout the ages.[67]

In liturgical drama the dramatic action is always concluded before the singing of 'Te Deum', which may also serve as a recessional. However Britten contrives to build dramatic action through the 'Custodés' climax, retaining the Nō convention of sudden revelation at the *dénouement*. In this sense, 'Te lucis'

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[66] Cooke 1998:148–49.
[67] Unpublished (Britten–Pears Library).

corresponds to the closing item in liturgical drama, functioning as a recessional. Nonetheless, it is over the text of 'Custodés' that Plomer contrives a prayer for the Ferryman and Traveller. Britten sets this in a manner recalling liturgical psalm-style (cf. the *Bunyan* Cronies, Ex. 1, iv and the worship service of *Grimes* II.2). The text at this point directly invokes the spirit of *Te Deum* as the following comparison illustrates:[68]

TE DEUM	*CURLEW RIVER* (Figs. 88-9)
2. All the earth doth worship thee...	And O, to the numberless…
3. To thee all Angels cry aloud...	To the holy and glorious saints…
7. The glorious company of Apostles...	To the holy saints and martyrs…
8. The company of the Prophets...	All the company…
10. The holy Church in the world...	Holy and glorious…
17. Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.	There in the blessed abode of eternal peacefulness, In the abode of eternal happiness…
27. O Lord, have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us.	Pray for us, all angels. Christ have mercy upon us. All angels, pray for us. All martyrs, pray for us, All saints, pray for us.

Britten's instrumental doubling of the lines of 'Custodés' is entirely in keeping with the liturgical dramatic convention. The use of bells, which Britten witnessed in the closing *Te Deum* of Greenberg's *Daniel*, is also appropriate liturgically. In the celebration of the Mass, Sanctus bells are chimed indicating for the Catholic the moment of transubstantiation – a point not without

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[68] Also compare with *Sumidagawa* text (Cooke 1998:146). Britten made three settings of *Te Deum*: in C major (1934, orch. 1936); *Festival Te Deum* (1944) and an unfinished setting (1961).

relevance to the 'Sanctus' of *War Requiem*, the single moment in that work with overt orientally derived sources (i.e. the gamelan).[69] Certainly it is at this point in the drama of *Curlew* that a miraculous change appears to occur in the Madwoman as a result of the 'miracle'.

Musically, the first three verses of the hymn are treated in an orthodox manner, the organ's changes of register between verses reflected in straightforward changes of orchestration. At Fig. 90 the doxology (still in the Dorian mode), is transposed to A, the bells now outlining A major–minor thirds. Britten's symbolic use of A major as 'Apollo' and a kind of 'guilty innocence' admitting a (homo)sexual ambiance, cf. *Young Apollo* and *Venice*, is curious in relation to the association with 'heaven' in *Curlew* (the specific connection at Fig. ^{2}81). The Madwoman's Motive also consists of the primary *Grimes* tritone, A–E^{b}, enharmonically reconfigured as A–D$^{\#}$, incorporating E – an interesting connection given Grimes' madness and Pears creation of both Grimes and Madwoman roles. This again indicates Britten's use of the cycle of fifths through semitonal relations, suggesting a spiritual tension that has telling implications for the *dénouement*.

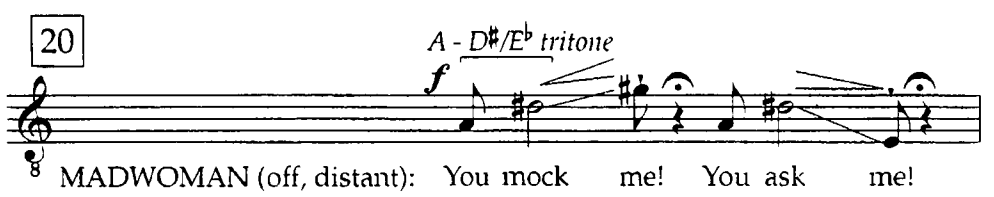
The ambiguity in Britten's symbolic use of A, between Christian concepts and the Greek god of the Sun, has additional relevance in almost every other instance of Britten's use of this tonal region.[70] Attention has been

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[69] Cooke 1996:70.
[70] Cooke (Cooke–Reed 1993:89).

drawn to the tension between Apollo and the sea (Dionysian) in *Grimes*.[71] The connection, through the appearance of the boy's Spirit in *Curlew* (Fig. 95), to the tension of the primary *Grimes* tritone (A–E♭) is striking, not least in the first appearance of that tritone as a focus in Britten's work being the third of the *Four French Songs* (1928), 'LÉnfance' (Victor Hugo) – depicting a happy child unaware of his mother's death (see Ex. 8, ii).[72]

Ex. 8, i, a. The Madwoman Motive



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[71] Palmer 1984:111–12.
[72] Tuchowski 1997:72–78.

Ex. 8, i, b. The ensemble invocation to pray in A (Fig. [2]81)



A Major/minor.....

Ex. 8, i, c. Climax of 'Custodés' (Trinity invocation in A–Dorian A)



Modal + A Major/minor.....

5. The dramaturgical context

> Since Plato, music has been regarded as a very tricky medium that can corrupt, effeminize, bedazzle, and delude. Most listeners do not know how to account for the effects music has on them, and thus they often understand those effects as manifestations of their own subjectivities, as their own inner truths. Thus a composer constructing a madwoman is compelled to ensure that the listener experiences and yet does not identify with the discourse of madness. It becomes crucial, therefore, that the musical voice of reason be ever audibly present as a reminder, so that the railings of the Madwoman will remain secretly marked as radically 'Other', so that the contagion will not spread.[73]

Britten deploys several different conventions in *Curlew* to ensure that the psychology of the Madwoman is treated with sympathy while the musical voice of reason is kept audibly present. The triple frame serves to emphasize the distance of audience from dramatic events (i.e. 'actors–monks–characters' reflected musically in 'plainsong–Abbot's address/moral–robing ceremony').[74]

Both plainsong and orientally derived sounds are more-or-less alien to the modern experience, although clearly the conventions of plainsong are more culturally familiar. The musical 'procession' from 'West' to 'East' is gradual and delicate, creating a ceremonial distancing effect emphasized by the relatively hieratic mode of movement, dress and manner discussed previously. Britten's heterophonic method extends the echoes that would otherwise surround the singing of liturgical items in a large medieval Church building, itself an interesting pretext for an alternative reading of Britten's

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[73] McClary 1991:86. This is a key statement to understanding the Dionysian 'plague' that lies at the core of the Apollonian aesthetic that will prove crucial to the revelations of *Venice*.
[74] Whether the frame is actually experienced in this way is a moot point.

decision of performance venue. The preponderance of seconds, fourths and fifths and augmented fourths can be rationalized in this way: for Britten, the selection of heterophony enables the secular element (the tritone constituting the *diabolus* in a medieval liturgical context) legitimately to enter the Christian discourse (Fig. [1]1).

Throughout *Curlew*, the primary pitch D and subsidiary C and A form long- and short-range centres, generally connected with the 'reasonable' characters of the Ferryman, Traveller and Chorus, around which the free atonality of the heterophony is arranged.[75] This is particularly true of the earlier part of the work, and is powerfully recapitulated in the Dorian focus of 'Custodés'.

Interestingly, given the frequency of the co-existence of C–D in the score, C is commonly viewed as the foundation tone of western art music whereas D is that of the Japanese system.[76] (Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* – a Japanese commission – is in monotonal D: d min., d min., D major/Lydian.) Britten's use indicates how the 'reasonable' pitch centres contrasted with the 'unbalanced' tritone of the Madwoman Motive and free atonality and rotation of twelve tones – particularly in the soliloquies – associated with her music elsewhere (cf. the opening of *War Requiem*, where the bell-tritone C–F$^{\#}$ and chromatic 'miasma' are set against a D–A locus, cf. Ex. 7, i, c).

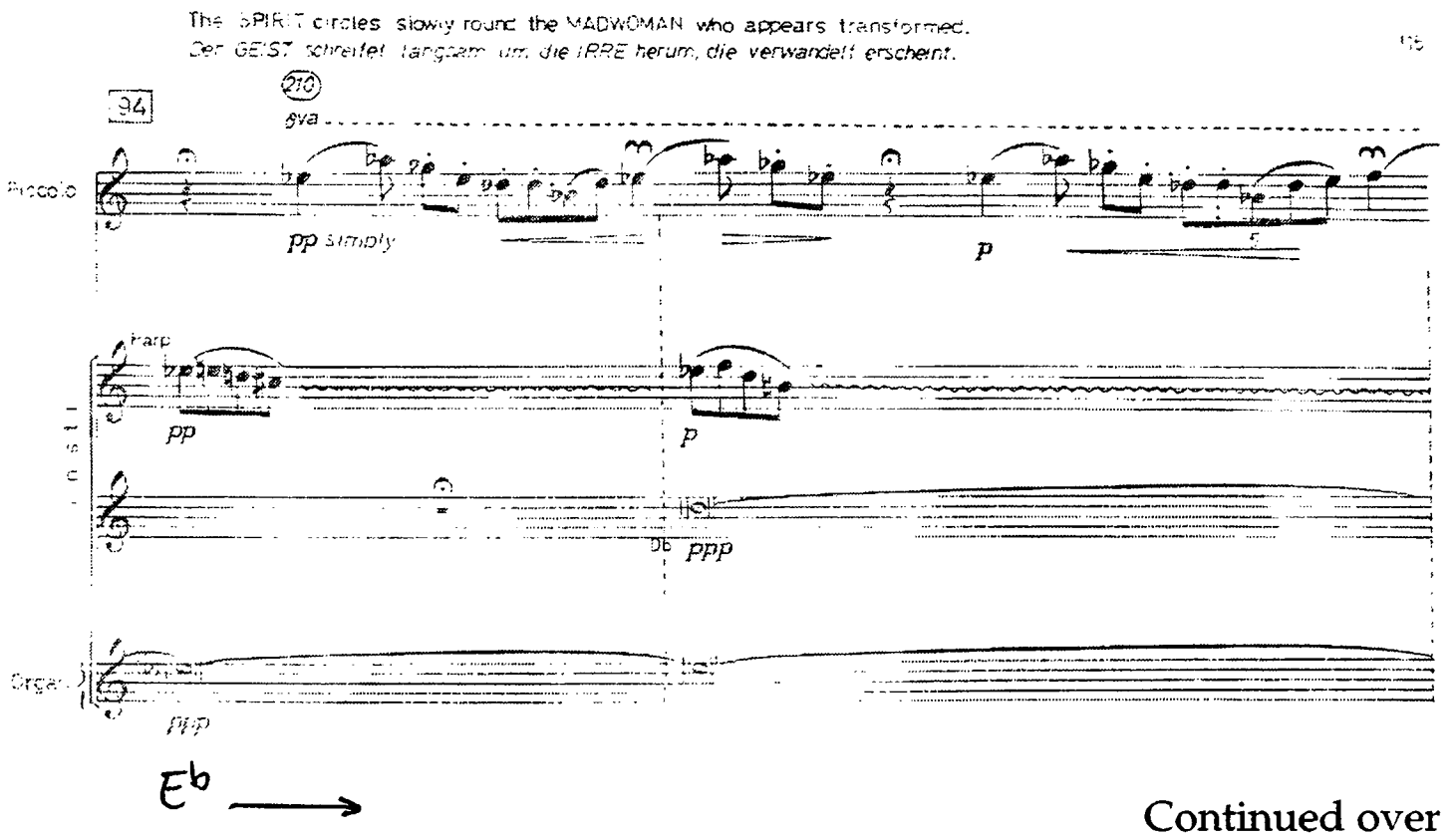
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[75] These same pitch 'differences', C–D, form the crux of *Fathers*. They also inform Elizabeth (D) and Essex (C) in *Gloriana*.
[76] Malm 1959:100–4.

6. Affirmation and Denial: the ambiguity of the *dénouement*

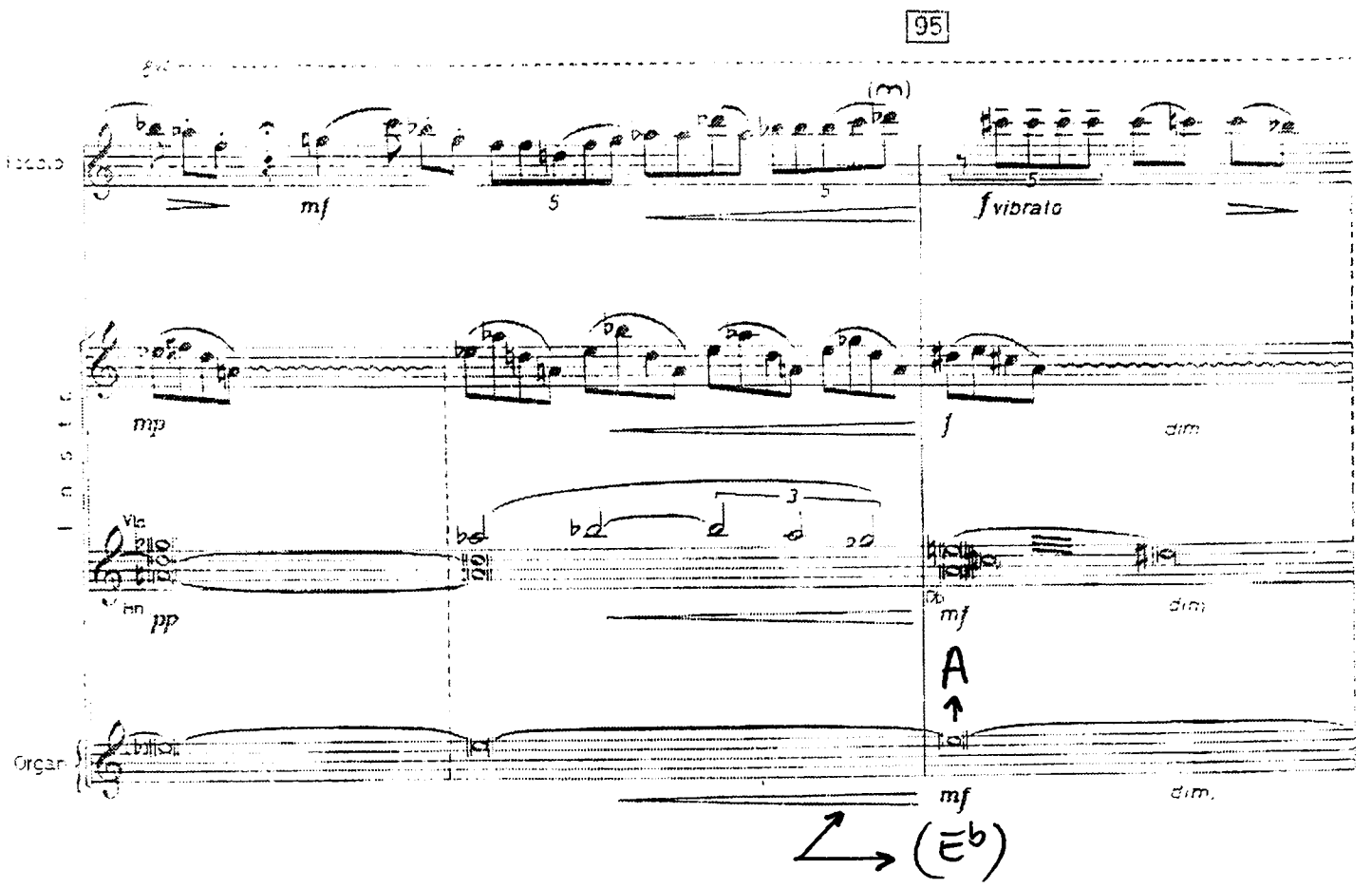
Britten had uncharacteristic problems in composing the *dénouement*. He wrote to Plomer on 2 April 1964: 'I'm fairly happy with [*Curlew*] except for one bit which I don't think I've got quite right yet, but if I can see it more clearly after a bit of a break I could always redo it', and it is a matter of record that this unsatisfactory part was 'undoubtedly the passage where the Spirit of the Boy appears; this was rewritten over and over again until the final version was at last achieved quite late on in the rehearsal stage, only a few days before the first performance.'[77] In fact Britten made at least 5 different attempts at it:

Ex. 8, ii. The *dénouement*

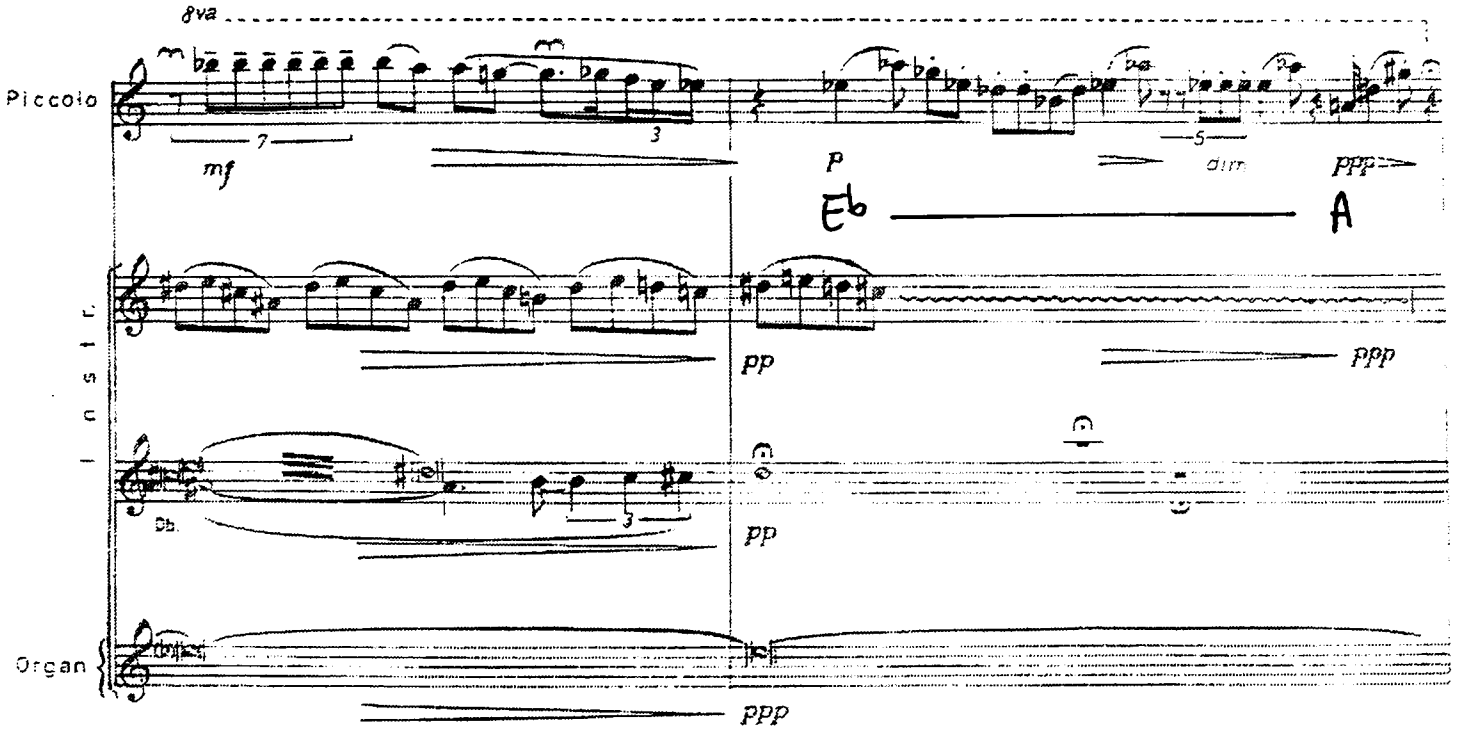


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[77] Strode (cited Banks 1992:241, fn. 76).



The SPIRIT returns to the tomb
Der GEIST kehrt in das Grab zurück.



Continued over



Continued over



Continued over



There is an apparent confusion in Graham's production notes about how the manner of the Boy Spirit's appearing is perceived. (It was Plomer who persuaded Britten to have 'the boy's actual appearance.'[78]) It is clear from the libretto that the boy is both seen and heard by the other characters: 'Hear his voice! See, there is his shape!' (Fig. 93). Yet, in production notes 207 and 210 it is stated that the Madwoman only sees the boy 'in her imagination.'[79] On the basis of this evidence, the 'resurrection' aspect of *Curlew* is highly equivocal (cf. *War Requiem*).[80] This ambiguity over reality and illusion can be compared with the *dénouement* of the *Screw*.

At the boy's appearance (Fig. 94), the piccolo theme is taken from the Madwoman's earlier music at Figs. 27 and 28 where she expresses a paradox:

MADWOMAN
Clear as a sky without a cloud
May be a mother's mind,
But darker than a starless night
With not one gleam to show the way.
All is clear but unclear too.

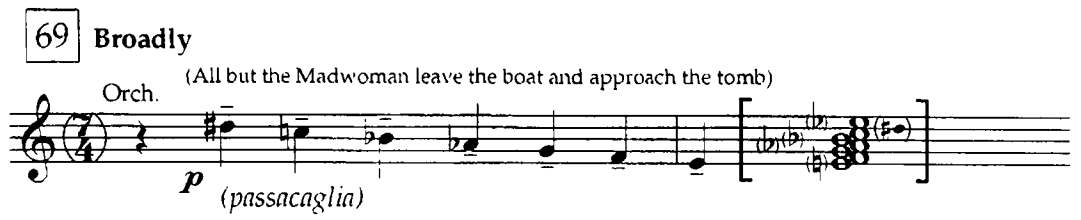
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[78] Cooke 1998:141.
[79] Graham 1983.
[80] Knussen (cited Carpenter 1992:438) and Rupprecht 2001:330, fn. 79.

This impression is retained in the ambiguity of her vision. The 'healing process' of the miracle is suggested by the music, which begins centred on $D^{\#}$–$G^{\#}$, pitches associated with madness–difference, now enharmonically E^{b}–A^{b} (cf. Quint's music). This phrase ascends sequentially to $C^{\#}$ at Fig. 95, by which stage an A major heterophony is thwarted by the retention of the tritone, and by melodic chromaticism in the piccolo that seems to belie the surface healing of the Madwoman. (The piccolo is symbolic of the Wingrave boy, murdered by a family member, in portrait 5 of *Wingrave*, Ex. 10, ii, a). The piccolo returns one bar before Fig. 96 to the 'clear/unclear' music, reducing it to a final statement of the Madwoman Motive. Musically at least, a healing has apparently not taken place.

The repeated 'Amens' after Fig. 96 inscribe the 'doomed' major–minor thirds so familiar since the *Fathers* motto, counteracting any 'positive' sense generated by the semitonal slides from E^{b} to E. Additionally they seem an attempt to get into the realm of A by moving from the tritonal E^{b} to E, but the heterophony in the organ resists this interpretation by accommodating both pitches in a cluster more approximate to A^{b} than to A, a semitonal situation approximating the closing moments of the Governess' music while holding the dead Miles at the end of the *Screw* (implying an interesting reading of *Curlew* as a 'Christian' sequel that chamber opera, on some level). This cluster, in the descending order Britten gives it at Fig. 96 and again at Fig. 97, is related to the passacaglia theme at Fig. 69, where all except the Madwoman leave the boat after the river crossing:

Ex. 8, iii.



It is as if what was once 'different' has not really been changed, but merely externally re-configured – or internally relocated, a situation enhanced by the reappearance of the passacaglia 'cluster theme' at the beginning of the closing robing ceremony (Ex. 8, ii, Fig. 97).

This is a point of great relevant to the later parables. At Fig. 94 the production notes state that the Madwoman '*appears* transformed' (italics added). The physical use of 'masks' in the parable convention, derived from Nō but also used in Greek theatre, may receive a deeper level of interpretation given this view. It should be remembered that Albert Herring is such a reconformed 'masked' character, as is Britten's Prodigal Son, a point demonstrated by the 'un-masking' of Owen Wingrave and Aschenbach. Britten's operas are ultimately about appearing to conform while simultaneously subverting such conformity – a concept reflected in his 'non-conformist' pacifist beliefs and lifestyle with Pears. This view of *Curlew* harmonizes with Britten's ultimately agnostic views on life after death (App. 2).[81] Such reading would imply that Britten's intention through the 'parables for Church performance' is not to support the idea of 'change' in the Christian

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[81] Pears (cited Carpenter 1992:583).

sense but rather 'integration' in the humanist sense. The juxtaposition of musical techniques and of 'West' and 'East' is, after all, the *raison d'être* behind the parable genre aesthetic. It may be fairly claimed that although Britten couches his various religious sources in a medieval mould, it is ultimately a spiritual tension with post-Renaissance (Neoplatonic) humanism that ultimately lies at the aesthetic core.

Conclusion

Britten's use of Christian themes and materials in *Curlew* is not so much born of a religious conviction than of convention: an 'acceptable' background against which a passive–aggressive appeal can be made. However, Britten has insisted on moving this gambit from the secular emphasis of his earlier operas (e.g. *Grimes*), into the specifically religious arena (via *Noye*).

The Madwoman, symbolic of this 'difference', is seen outwardly to conform through her 'healing' by Western Christian liturgies and prayers to the Trinity ('Custodés') – in which Britten did not apparently believe – and a Christian vision of the resurrection – which Britten did not hold. Yet this complete transference is undermined dramaturgically by ambiguity about the nature of the vision amplified in Britten's music. The resultant dualism, indicated by 'Eastern' importations to 'Western' liturgical manners, gives rise to the perceived 'confusion of aim'. This 'confusion' is multiplied when the homoeroticism Carpenter, Brett, Hindley and others impute to Britten's work, combined with his apparent search for a musical 'benediction' on such

unregenerate states (homosexual or any other kind), is impossible in Biblical terms – terms which Western liturgies are meant to invoke and praise.

Chapter 9: The later parables: spiritual points of departure

The Burning Fiery Furnace

The *fons et origo* of the second parable was ostensibly Britten's experience of a sculpture at Chartres Cathedral.[1] He intended to create a 'brother' to *Curlew* and create 'something much less sombre, an altogether gayer affair'.[2] *Furnace* was also Britten's creative response to his negative experience of Greenberg's production of *The Play of Daniel*. The liturgical *ludus* ('play') was itself an advanced development, bordering on parody, of the medieval mode of ceremonial presentation. The play had therefore been clerically marginalized to the unofficial burlesque revelries of the Feast of Fools (1 January). These qualifications mark the piece as distinct from the more restrained (early) liturgical dramatic models Britten had drawn from Young for *Curlew*. *Daniel*, even in Greenberg's 'realization', could serve as a generic model for a second, 'lighter', parable. This would forge aesthetic connections between Western vernacular sacred play types and Eastern Japanese Kabuki in a complementary manner to the early liturgical dramatic and Nō sources behind *Curlew*.

The plainsong, 'Salus aetérna' (in D major) immediately creates the impression of a lighter atmosphere than the mood of the first parable.

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[1] Graham (Herbert 1979/89):49.
[2] Britten 1965:13–14.

The relatively striking diversity of tones, thirds and (archaic) fourths – the dramatic significance of the latter two intervals proving particularly crucial – allows for more open textures via a greater direct contact with diatonicism than Britten had permitted himself with the greater preponderance of tones and semitones of the 'Te lucis' plainsong of *Curlew*. All three plainsongs for the parables contain pentatonic qualities, linked to *selisir*, which makes for greater organic flow with the orientally derived materials that follow them. However their individual intervallic qualities tend to define the mood of the respective parable to a degree (Exs. 9, i, a–c).

Britten's greater use of *leitmotives* across a wider range of characters in *Furnace*, including the greater dramatic participation of the chorus, also increases the 'Western' feeling. However the relative 'opening out' of *Furnace* is offset by both Britten's anticlimactic setting of the 'Benedicite' and the sudden d minor shift in the Abbot's concluding benediction and 'Amen' (with precedent in the close of the Queen's prayer at the end of Act I, *Gloriana*).

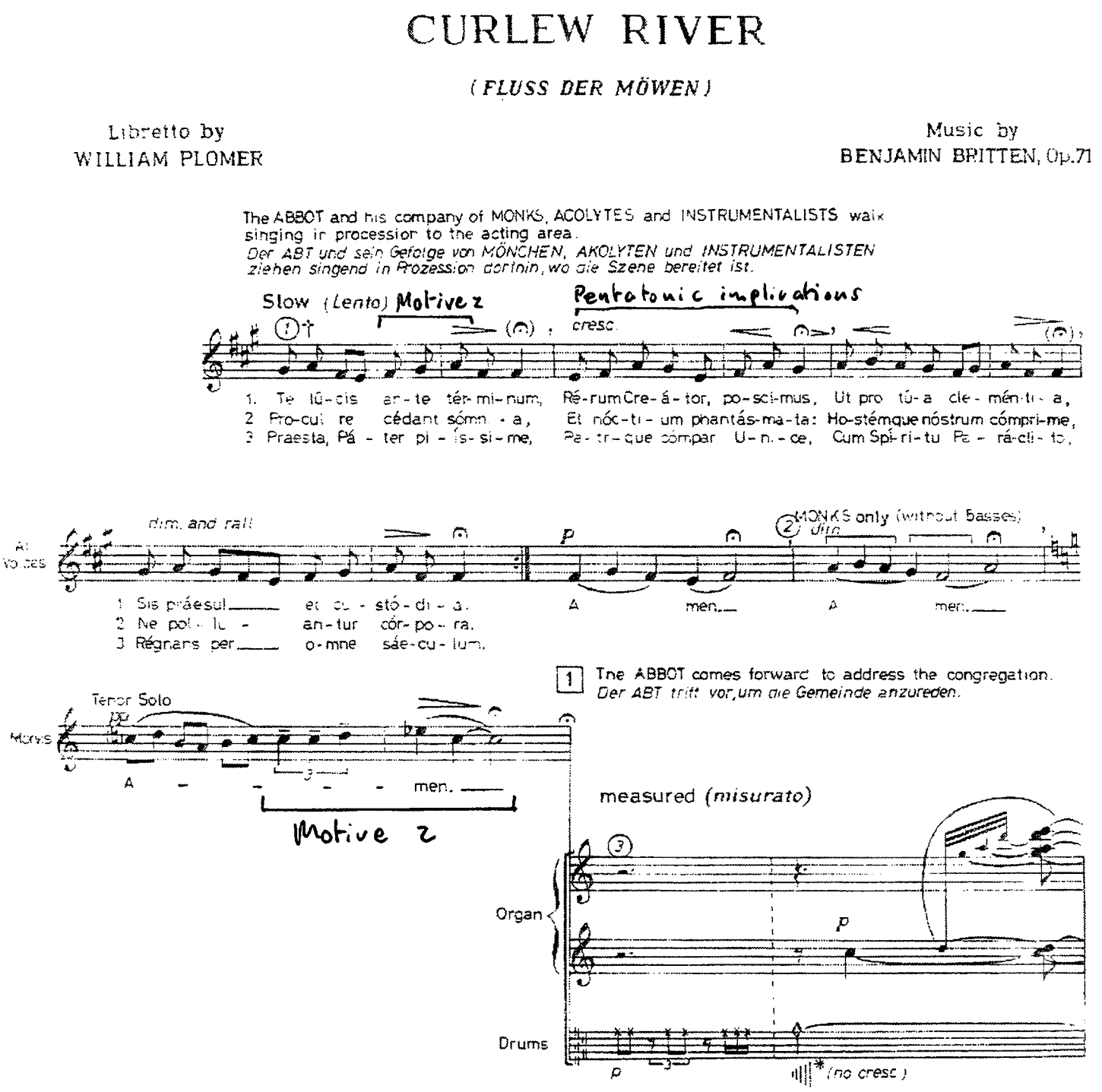
The appropriation of the *jo–ha–kyū* structure of Nō drama to the articulation of the action in *Furnace* has been observed.[3] However, a simultaneous bi-partite structure overlaying the Japanese model can be discerned, delineated by the Herald's addresses at Figs. 7 and 52. It is this structure that parallels *Daniel* to an interesting degree. Where *Daniel* is structured over four principal events (Abbot's address–Belshazzar's Feast–

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[3] Cooke 1998:198.

The lions den–'Te Deum'), so it is with *Furnace* (Abbot's address–Nebuchadnezzar's Feast–The fiery furnace–'Benedicite').

Ex. 9, i, a.



Ex. 9, i, b.

THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE
(Die Jünglinge im Feuerofen)

Libretto by
WILLIAM PLOMER

Music by
BENJAMIN BRITTEN, Op. 77

The ABBOT and his company of MONKS, ACOLYTES and INSTRUMENTALISTS walk singing in procession to the acting area.
Der ABT und seine Gruppe von MÖNCHEN, AKOLYTEN und INSTRUMENTALISTEN wandeln in Prozession singend zur Spielfläche.

① **Moderately slow** *(Moderato)*

* Pentatonic implication

ALL VOICES
ALLE STIMMEN

Sá - lus ae - tér na, in - de fi - ci - ens mún - di ví - ta, lux sem - pi - tér - na,

4th Triad

All voices — *dim* — MONKS only / *nur MÖNCHE*

et re - dém - pti - o vë - re nó - stra, Con - dó - lens hu má - na pe rí - re sáe - cla

Monks

per ten tán us nú mi na, non lín - quens ex cél sa ad - í - sti í - ma

Monks — ALL VOICES — *p*

pró - pri a cle - mén ti - a. Sá lus ae - tér na, in de - fi ci - ens
(lux sem - pi tér - na, et re - dém - pti o

All voices — MONKS only — *f* — *dim*

mún - di ví - ta, Móx tú a spon tá - ne - a grá - ti - a, as - sú mens
vé re nó stra.)

Monks — *p* — *f* — *dim*

hu - má - na, quae fú e - rant pér - di - ta ó - mni - a sal - vá - sti tér re - a.

Monks — *p* — ALL VOICES — *p*

fé - rens mún - do gáu - di a. (Sá - lus ae - tér na, in - de fi - ci ens
lux sem pi tér na, et re dém - pti o

All voices — ② — ABBOT / *ABT* — *cresc.*

mún - di ví ta,) God be with you all!
vé re nó - stra. *Gott sei mit euch ol - len!*

* Anhemitonic (Slendro)

Ex. 9, i, c.

THE PRODIGAL SON
(Der Verlorene Sohn)

Libretto by
WILLIAM PLOMER

Music by
BENJAMIN BRITTEN, Op. 81

The MONKS, ACOLYTES and INSTRUMENTALISTS walk singing in procession to the acting area.
Die singenden MÖNCHE, AKOLUTHEN und INSTRUMENTALISTEN gehen prozessionsmässig zur Spielfläche.

With movement
Con moto

① ALL VOICES (except ABBOT)
ALLE STIMMEN (ausser dem ABT)

1. Jam lú - cis ór - to si - de re, Dé um pre - cé - mur súp pli ces,
2. Lin - guam re frae - nans tém - pe ret, Ne lí tis hór - ror in so net:
3. Sint pu - ra cor dis in ti - ma, Ab - sís - tat et ve - cór di - a:
4. Ut cum di es ab scés - se rit, Noc - tém - que sors re - dú xe rit,

Ut in di úr nis ac - ti bus. Nos ser - vet a no - cén - ti bus.
mf Pent. implicationus

Vi sum fo - vén - do cón - te gat, Ne va - ni tá - tes háu ri at.
Cár - nis té rat su - per - bi am Pó tus ci bí - que par - ci tas.)

Mun - di per ab sti nén - ti am Ip - si ca ná - mus gló ri am.

The TEMPTER (the ABBOT) is heard from the opposite end of the church.
Man hört den VERSUCHER (ABT) vom entgegengesetzten Ende der Kirche.

TEMPTER
VERSUCHER

A men! A men!
A men. A men.

* Anhemitonic (Slendro)

Unlike *ludus,* the concluding 'Te Deum' of which is brightly accompanied by peals of bells (cf. 'Custodés hominum' in *Curlew*), Britten's setting of the 'Benedicite' in *Furnace* is organized in a manner redolent of the concluding monodic items over organum fourths of early liturgical dramas. This is particularly curious given the symbolic connection of fourths with the unregenerate Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon earlier (Vere's and Claggart's (*Budd*) and Quint's (*Screw*) fourths come to mind, although the fourths of Collatinus (*Lucretia*) prevent a clear-cut distinction of this interval with 'corruption', unless irony is intended).

The insertion of such a sombre 'Benedicite', after the *ludus*-like burlesque preceding it, does indeed create a generic dissonance when related back to the western models. This situation may be reflected by Britten's comments to Plomer three months before composition began:

> But I am not clear in my mind yet about the end of the whole opera; whether this is the musical climax, or after Nebuchadnezzar's change of religious heart.[4]

Britten's hesitancy indicates that he had Nō convention in mind, where the drama ends abruptly at the climax – the parallel moment being Nebuchadnezzar's 'transformation'. His decision to allow the dramatic action to continue after this point into an extension of the relatively static 'Benedicite' (unlike the sudden conclusion of *Curlew* with the vision of the Boy's Spirit and the Madwoman's 'healing') underpins the leaning towards Western dramatic norms in the later parables. However, in spite of the

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[4] Unpublished, 28 July 1965 (Britten—Pears Library).

considerable beauty of the 'Benedicite' setting, the *dénouement* also subverts the unequivocally celebratory conclusion to the liturgical dramatic type. *Furnace* proceeds from jollity to sobriety in spite of Britten's stated aims for the parable as a 'lighter' complement to *Curlew*. Attempts have been made to explain this by attributing to the 'Benedicite' Britten's refusal to allow the Israelite victory to appear triumphalist.[5]

A further distinction between *Furnace* and liturgical dramatic models is Britten's setting of the 'Benedicite' in the vernacular not in Latin, unlike 'Custodés hominum' in *Curlew* at the same dramatic moment. Unlike the 'Benedicitus es, Domine Deus' which, as the canticle of David, derives from Scripture (I Chronicles 29:10–13), and was the specific text set at the conclusion of the Daniel-play sequences. In a most revealing passage – not annotated by Britten – Young refers to an enhanced dramatic presentation of Nebuchadnezzar's prophecy in an *Ordo Prophetarum* from Rouen. The proximity of theme with that of the second part of Britten's second parable is striking:

> For enlivening the prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar a still more elaborate action is devised. As a stage setting are provided a furnace made of cloth and oakum, and some sort of figure to serve as the golden idol of the Biblical account. Pointing to this image, the king begins the action abruptly by ordering two of his soldiers to command the youths, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to fall down in worship. When they respond by spurning the idol, the three young men are haled into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar. Hearing of their contumacy, the king angrily orders that they be cast into the furnace. After this order has

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[5] Hindley (*MQ*) 1992:143–68. The Israelites humility of would constitute a passive-aggressive strategy, germane to a reading of *Furnace* in which the 'Israelites' represent, on some level, the homosexual ambiance Hindley proposes.

> been executed, and the furnace lighted, the *pueri* sing 'Benedictus es, Domine Deus'.[6]

In addition to the action described, the use of props for both the image of gold and the furnace itself are important precedents for the stagecraft in Britten's drama. Liturgically, the presentation of this *ordo* almost certainly occurred during the Feast of Fools at Circumcision (1 January), the same feast for which *Daniel* was prepared.[7]

Britten's 'Benedicite', on the other hand, derives from the pseudapigraphic Apocryphal addition to *Daniel* chapter three, and is therefore not recognized as canonical by any tradition other than Roman Catholic – a denominational connection with the Latin of *War Requiem* and the prayer to Mary for forgiveness in *Lucretia* (Interlude II).[8] The central plainsong of Britten's 'Benedicite' is, like 'Custodés hominum', authentic, and can be found in Britten's copy of the *Liber Usualis* (xxxii-iv):[9]

Ex. 9, ii. Britten's 'Benedicite' source.



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[6] II:168. 'Benedicitus es, Domine Deus' is the Alleluia Verse for Ember Saturday.
[7] *Ibid.*:169.
[8] Daniel 3:51–90 forms the (edited) 'Benedicite' text, *The Jerusalem Bible* 1968:1236–37.
[9] Britten–Pears Library.

Ex. 9, ii, b. Britten's 'Benedicite'



Continued over

Neb.

p

But I see four men free,
Doch ich seh' vier Mann frei

Ast.

King.
Herr.

ANGEL p

MISAEL p

Praise him and mag-ni - fy him for e - ver!
Lobt und ver-herr-li - chet Ihn für im - mer!

ANANIAS p

Praise him and mag-ni - fy him for e - ver!
Lobt und ver-herr-li - chet Ihn für im - mer!

AZARIAS p

Praise him and mag-ni - fy him for e - ver!
Lobt und ver-herr-li - chet Ihn für im - mer!

Major triad

Organ pp

Picc.

pp

Horn

Harp

pp

Viola

pp

(sul pont.)

Db.

pp

Multiple Whip

Perc.

pp

Britten's use of organum-like fourths is entirely appropriate to medieval liturgical dramatic convention. However, Britten's predominantly minor inflections, both in the transpositions of the sequences and in the mourning tone of the boy angel, seem calculated to remain in the mind rather than the perfunctory major triad cadences (although the concluding C major may be perceived to be a long-term resolution of the dominant sevenths of G major of the Israelites' earlier prayer 'Lord, Help us in our loneliness' extended through the G major resolutions of the 'Benedicite' cadences).

Given the appearance of the 'Benedicite' text in *Grimes* (II.2) and the *Screw* (II.2, 'The Bells'), this specific text may have had some particular significance for the composer. In light of its previous operatic association with contexts of corruption, the powerfully introspective, downbeat, mood of the 'Benedicite' setting in *Furnace* is notable (recalling the anticlimactic effect of the Litany at the end of *Bunyan*).

Strangeness rather than affirmation is the received and lasting impression, underpinned by the sudden shift to d minor at the conclusion of the 'Salus aetérna' plainsong at the end of the work. Bearing in mind the kind of 'masks' 'Benedicite' represents in *Grimes* and the *Screw*, it has been noted elsewhere that the 'Benedicite' is not an act of praise to Jehovah, but a conceit – an aesthetic mask – concealing another layer of meaning.[10] In this sense we could claim that although Nebuchadnezzar wears a mask throughout (and it is notable that it is not removed at his 'conversion'), Shadrach, Meshach and

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[10] Hindley (*MQ*) 1992:162–63 claims that the paradigm of *Furnace* is a humanistic 'salvation-by-integrity-of-conscience' serving as a justification for homosexuality in affirmative terms.

Abednego wear musical masks formed from the liturgical and religious surfaces of their music. (This mask is the difference between Biblical doctrine the liturgical source is meant to represent and the illicit component that has been argued elsewhere for the Israelites, the Apocryphal nature of the 'Benedicite' text feeding into this extra-Biblical ambiguity.)

In *Furnace* the triad mainly operates independently of tonal and even diatonic functions. They are, however, often a distillation of potentially longer chains of thirds, touching on mediant relations, heard as different to the (quartal) fourths symbolic of oppression, whether that of the cult of the god of Gold or simultaneously that of the Biblical religion of Jehovah. At the moment of Nebuchadnezzar's 'change of religious heart' he sings: 'And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God' to the 'Salus aetérna' phrase which includes the interval of a fourth (cf. Ex. 9, i, b). Britten uses the fourth in the organum of his 'Benedicite', a striking musical irony given the intervals symbolic relevance elsewhere, although perhaps here suggesting a musical 'transfiguration' matching that of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. the *dénouement* reconfiguration of the A–E^{b} tritone 'healing' the Madwoman).

Britten uses second inversion triads to conclude the 'Benedicite' phrases (G major for the first few entries; then, after Nebuchadnezzar's 'conversion' at Fig. 89, $F^{\#}$ major, a minor, and final C major). Traditionally this is the weakest form of any triadic presentation (related to *fauxbourdon*, lit: *'false* bass'). Nebuchadnezzar's statement of faith at Fig. 88 is announced in $F^{\#}$ major (cf. 'Agnus Dei' of *War Requiem*) to the same music that was used in the

earlier naming ceremony for Ananias, Misael and Azariah at Fig. 17 (the latter passing through various inflections, including minor, major, and Lydian D). The harmonic dissonance of this passage in relation to the overarching progression from G major to C major is striking. Biblically, in Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar had to go through further, and greater, public humiliation, before completely submitting and surrendering to Jehovah.[11]

As has been argued elsewhere, the naming ceremony, which passes as mere comment in the Biblical account, is accentuated in Britten's parable.[12] In their 'soliloquy', the Israelites sing:

> They have given us new names
> To disguise our true natures:
> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego!
> But names cannot change us.
> What we are, we remain.

The first four lines are sung to a chord derived from a chain of thirds (B^{b}, D, F, A, $C^{\#}$, E) re-arranged over the B^{b} to create the kind of more widely spaced chords typical of this parable in contrast with its predecessor. This then opens out at Fig. 49 into a statement of the first phrase of the 'Salus aeterna' plainsong over a chord of G^{6} major to the text: 'What we are we remain' – a very important precedent, both musically and textually – of the Peace Chord of Owen Wingrave's Peace Aria.

Contrast in Britten's use of fourths and thirds as representative of the outward observance of social requirements and the inner integrity of

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[11] Howard 1969:216, working from an earlier libretto text. Whether this was significant for Britten is a moot point.
[12] Hindley 1992 (*MQ*):152–53.

conviction respectively has been noted with the caveat that the two may not be mutually exclusive.[13] It is perhaps the blending of fourths and thirds that we find in the prayer of the Israelites at Fig. 42[2] that may indicate their perfect blend of outward observance (that is at least outward enough to be detected by the jealous Babylonians) and inner integrity: the overwhelming presence of the fourth in the music of the Babylonians would appear to indicate a legalism of observance in the worship of the Babylonian gods.

However, we note with interest that Nebuchadnezzar's irritated responses to the Astrologer's interruptions during his prayer to Merodak contain prominent minor thirds as well as the expected fourths, indicating at least a semblance of spiritual integrity in contrast to the other Babylonians that marks him out, even at this stage, as someone who may respond to the certain 'Jehovah' of Britten's Israelites:

Ex. 9, iii.



But this theorizing begins to break down once it begins to deal with areas of theology and doctrine:

> We have thus arrived at the leavening, even subversive, Protestant principle of the supremacy of conscience (a theological version of Britten's 'individual against the crowd').[14]

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[13] Hindley (*MQ*) 1992:161.
[14] *Ibid.*

Here there is a failure to distinguish between a totally emancipated conscience, which is implied, and a conscience that is governed by, or contained within, the boundaries set in Scripture. As the Apostle Paul put it 'My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent'.[15] There is a danger of obscuring the very issue that is aurally present in the concluding 'Benedicite'. The Israelite victory from the perspective of a reading of the parable that harmonizes with Britten's biography is pyrrhic in Biblical terms (in the tradition of Britten's 'Christianised' *Budd* and *Screw*, where fourths also indicate and 'evil' or 'malign' will). The predominant impression of organum fourths over triadic resolution might be considered to obscure redemptive potential if this symbolic analogy is logically pursued (cf. the predominance of minor thirds over major in the *dénouement* of *Lucretia*). This unresolved issue is subsequently taken up in *Prodigal*. It has been observed that:

> The difference between [*Grimes* and the *Furnace*] is that in the opera of 1945 such [homosexual] self-affirmation was forced to recant and destroy itself, while twenty years later, the church parable could proclaim that that same affirmation might (however shocking the thought in some quarters) be blessed by God.[16]

So much chimes well with the previously discussed proposal that Britten aestheticises a musical 'benediction' in his operas that circumvents Biblical doctrines yet retains a connection to Christian ideas. Yet it is later claimed:

> The crucial fact [in *Furnace*] is not the supernatural mythology of its action, but the settled inner conviction achieved by the young men for themselves: 'What we are we remain.' The miracle consists not in the outward spectacle of the three men surviving the fire unscathed, but in

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[15] 1 Corinthians 4:4 (N.I.V.).
[16] Hindley (*MQ*) 1992:143.

> the sense (conveyed by the angel's music) that their own conviction about themselves, however subjective, embodies an ultimate truth, an affirmation they cannot abandon without abandoning life itself.[17]

The logical consequence of such claims, which the present author can agree may have reflected Britten's own, is that the integrity of Britten's (or whoever else's) conscience is his god: thus, in order to be 'blessed by God', he must be blessed by himself. As such the conscience becomes Narcissus-like, an image pronouncing a benediction upon itself (cf. Vere's Epilogue in *Budd*). Such a view would also harmonize with Britten's addressing of this subject in his setting of early T. S. Eliot in his final Canticle V: *The Death of St. Narcissus* (1974), and the connection of such a theme with *Venice*. It is also an invaluable tool in understanding Britten's technical method in achieving the turning of unregenerate guilt into 'innocence'.

The notion of the double distance thus created by this thesis (i.e. the surface reading of the *Furnace* as 'Merodak versus Jehovah' is really a mask for the subversive message 'Jehovah versus emancipated conscience') is convincing as a construct regarding consistency of theme across Britten's *oeuvre*: the 'Hebrew boys' are divided against the Babylonians, but they are also further divided in themselves in that their consciences oppose the laws of Jehovah (cf. the *Grimes* Borough) whom they now ostensibly represent. For this reason *Furnace* is not as successful as an ultimate affirmation between Britten's conscience and the fulfilment of his desire for internal harmony with Christianity. What may be felt in the 'Benedicite' is the melancholy burden

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[17] *Ibid.*:162.

Britten felt in carrying the knowledge of the requirements of Jehovah impregnated in his Puritan conscience, and his inability to cast this off.[18]

On his own terms, the 'victory' Britten achieves in *Furnace* is the relative success of his representatives (the 'Israelites') against the socio-political abuse of religion, unlike *Grimes*. In this respect the parable forms an effective commentary on *War Requiem*. But it is the inability of the Israelites as representative of Britten's conscience to distance themselves further from Jehovah that gives rise to the mood of heavily qualified affirmation in the 'Benedicite'.

The Prodigal Son

It has become a trope in Britten criticism to castigate the second and especially the third parable in light of the dramaturgical accomplishments of the first.[19] The fact that Britten dedicated *Prodigal* to Dmitri Shostakovitch – a musical mask-wearer *par excellence* – perhaps demonstrates that Britten must have been basically confident of its dramaturgical and artistic integrity. What has been all to infrequently acknowledged is the difference of trajectory in each parable, and how the change in design fits the verisimilitude of Britten's respective aims, whether agreed with or otherwise. Plomer wrote to Britten after the premiere:

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[18] 'When [church] is really in your bones, even when put there against your will, it's very difficult to get rid of it – and I don't know if [Britten] wanted to.' Pears 1978:15.
[19] Holloway (Palmer 1984:221–25).

> Almost everybody who has spoken or written to me about the *Prodigal* uses some phrase about liking it 'best' of the three church operas. This unanimity provokes me into replying, a little sharply, that each of them had better be appreciated for itself. But you & Peter & Colin have in fact done wonders, & I don't think the Bishop of St Ipswich was far wrong when he spoke of 'integrity' if by that he meant a clear & unified whole. The impact is unforgettably clear & fresh & direct upon ear, eye, & sensibility. I am so happy to have had anything to do with the evolution of this splendid work.[20]

Yet the more that is understood about Britten's ultimate antipathy to the Biblical theme of Christian redemption through repentance (as man's loving response to grace), the more it will be understood how, in his final parable, Britten succeeded in marking out his own spiritual position before the New Testament derived text in purely musical terms.[21] This provided a way into the apparently secular scenarios of *Wingrave* and *Venice*. In this sense, the incongruity of the religious (embodied in the parables) and the secular (embodied in the last two operas) can be better understood, especially as two trajectories emanating from the dualistic concerns of *War Requiem*.[22]

Mitchell has made an important connection between the Prodigal and Albert Herring:

> There will be few who do not respond to the deeply human and humane characterization of the parable's central figure, who, like Albert, wins his emancipation and is ultimately enriched by his experience. [...] They share the consistency of the composer's approach, which makes *Herring* so much more than comedy and *The Prodigal Son* so much more than ritual.[23]

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[20] Unpublished, 14 June 1968 (Britten–Pears Library). The 'Bishop of St. Ipswich' was Leslie Brown (App. 2).

[21] Britten had composed a work based on Scripture (Psalm 127) to open the newly built Maltings Concert Hall, Snape, in 1967, *The Building of the House*, in which heterophony abounds.

[22] Both strata recur in Britten's late choral sequence *Sacred and Profane* (1975).

[23] Mitchell (Palmer 1984:214).

This striking observation is intriguing: although socially the implications of both stories are superficially the same, there should be no greater difference of spiritual implication between the respective *dénouements* involving an unrepentant Albert and the Biblically repentant Prodigal.[24] It is again the nature of the conclusion of the parable in which certain musical issues seem to impinge upon the spiritual direction of the libretto.

It is acknowledged that roughly the final third of *Prodigal* was written during a period of intense illness for Britten, a factor so significant that it may not be possible to discount its effects on the quality of the music:

> By breaking all doctors' orders, & really thrashing my poor old self, I have finished *Prodigal Son* – score & all. [...] It is sickening that it had to be the most difficult & important bit of the whole work which remained to be done.[25]

Britten himself confirmed the likelihood of psychosomatic origins for his illnesses. It may also be possible not to discount the connection between this and Britten's antipathy – albeit at a subconscious level – to the need for repentance germane to the original parable of Jesus.[26] It should also be noted that serious illnesses throughout his life, most significantly during the period of composing *Venice*, did not seem to affect the quality of Britten's music. A similar diagnosis (psychological rather than directly medical) may be applied to his famously uncharacteristic difficulty in composing the Madwoman's concluding interaction with the Boy's Spirit in *Curlew*. That *dénouement* deals

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[24] In its original Biblical context (Luke 15:11-32) the context is unequivocally one of spiritual repentance (cf. v. 7).
[25] Britten (Carpenter 1992:481).
[26] App. 2.

with the subject of the resurrection, which Britten had so clearly challenged in passive–aggressive terms in his Owen settings in *War Requiem*. Like the preceding accounts, this conclusion about *Prodigal* must also be set in context.

It is Britten's fusion of different medieval genres that presents his audience with the 'strangeness' of genre and historical context, e.g. the relative interpolation of 'play' embodied by the Madwoman into the ceremonial *ordo* of the other participants in *Curlew* and the (reverse) interpolation of the restraints and demands of ceremony represented by the 'Hebrew' boys into the 'play' element of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in *Furnace*. In these medieval liturgical dramatic/Nō contexts, the irrational or Dionysian elements of the respective Parable dramaturgies (Madwoman–Nebuchadnezzar–Tempter) stand out in sharper relief, qualities also present in the dramatic sources. These Dionysian elements are apparently sublimated into the Apollonian victory of each of the three respective *dénouements* (represented by an equivalent religious redemption in a face-value reading, cf. *Venice*, though in exclusively secular terms). Yet the nature of this redemption is simultaneously questioned, as in the case of other Britten operas examined in the present thesis.[27]

In the liturgical dramatic tradition, the portrayal of Herod appears to have interested Britten in a special way, much as he had the medieval audiences.[28] The portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar in *Furnace* indicates that

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[27] Allen (Cooke 1999:284–88) discusses *Little Sweep* and *Noye* in this kind of context.
[28] Cooke 1998:164.

Britten's understanding of the comic import of Herod's character as he appeared in many of the *Officium Stellae*. Young points out that Herod's role was described with great care in the various rubrics, to a degree that 'naturalistic' acting, going well beyond quasi-ceremonial representation, was required. He was projected as a man of emotional extremes, adding to a sense of the comic.[29] Elsewhere Young explains how major sacred characters would be represented as calm and composed in a majority of cases. Emotional displays were reserved for the spiritually unstable. This discernment applies to Britten's musical difference between Nebuchadnezzar, the Astrologer and the Babylonians (emotionally unstable) on the one hand, and Meshach, Shedrach and Abednego (composed) on the other.[30]

In later examples of liturgical drama (and in parts of Young marked by Britten) Herod's character is permitted to break free from the ceremonial presentation of the narrative into 'real time', where he begins to interfere with the running of the liturgy itself, disrupting the eighth lesson. Having established his own authority he then begins reading the ninth lesson.[31] This can be seen to anticipate the way in which the Tempter disrupts the triple frame at the beginning *Prodigal*, Britten's triple frame convention mimicking liturgical status within the parable genre by this stage. He then proceeds to break up the family. In the concluding triple frame, the Abbot (who has played the Tempter role), concludes the 'liturgy', as Young has described of

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[29] II:83–84, 'Herod's gestures (comic)'.
[30] *Ibid.*:405–6.
[31] *Ibid.*:100, 'Herod's gestures (comic)'.

Herod, in a more appropriate style. Herod and the Tempter – both ultimately products of chaos – break through the 'frames' that keep them from direct contact with the audience.

As with *Furnace*, the opening plainsong 'Jam lucis orto sidere' is in D major – a key that, as we have now seen in several Britten contexts, can be treated as something of a 'mask' or outward projection (Ex. 9, i, c, e.g. Crownèd Rose Theme, *Gloriana*). This sense is reinforced by the fact that the Borough begins their hypocritical worship service at the beginning of *Grimes* with a version of 'Jam lucis orto sidere' (II.2).

One difficulty associated with liturgical dramatic representation is the question of the appropriateness or otherwise of certain Biblical situations for re-enactment in a place of religious worship. This historical fact is often overlooked in criticism of Britten's presentation of the temptations in *Prodigal*.[32] The final reference to Herod in Young which is marked by Britten concerns his death, which was, by all accounts, particularly gory, his bowels being eaten alive by worms: it would appear that this particular *Officium Stellae* was not written for liturgical use but was nonetheless designed for church performance, a point that has obvious relevance to Britten's parables, which are similarly designed.[33] Young concludes that the scene was done in

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[32] Holloway (Palmer 1984:222–23).

[33] Young, II (1933/51):194–96, 'Death of Herod (Officium included)'. In another reference (I:536, 'Where Played'), Young refers to a passion play – rare in itself in the liturgical drama repertoire, because Christ's Passion is dealt with in the Mass (the passion play belonging more properly to the vernacular play tradition). Young refers to this liturgical play as disordered, resembling more 'an episodic religious opera'. Young relates that, although scarcely designed for a liturgical service, it was almost certainly intended for performance within the church building, a precedent for Britten's designated 'parable for Church performance' genre.

a type of pantomime, reminding spectators of the story rather than presenting it in a realistically gory manner.

The difficulty Britten faced as he began to actually compose the music, as demonstrated in numerous references in letters to Plomer and the relatively large number of libretto alterations (Britten–Pears Library), was how to project the sexual, drunken and gambling activities called for by the narrative in the 'holy-theatre' of the church building (e.g. unlike Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, an opera dealing with similar subject in the 'secular' area of the opera house).[34] The sexual problem was greatly compounded through the use of an all-male cast, including boys' voices, and Britten's use of the latter as 'seductive, acolyte, voices "off" to add to the nightmare atmosphere'.[35]

There are differing opinions about the degree of success of his chosen solution.[36] The requirement of religious propriety may also explain Britten's desire for the Tempter's role not to be projected as 'pure devilry' but a subtler

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[34] Britten (cited Carpenter 1992:478–79). Carpenter speculates that Stravinsky's opera to an Auden-Kallman libretto, the music of which Britten detested, served as an 'anti-model' for *Prodigal*. This would reflect the earlier 'anti-model' of Greenberg's *Daniel* for Britten's *Furnace*. Mitchell 1963/93:98–100, the dedicatee of *Furnace*, discusses this issue in Stravinsky's case.

[35] Carpenter 1992:480 has pointed out the homoerotic overtones of this section. Plomer, who had previously been arrested in 1943 for propositioning a sailor on Paddington Station, gives secondary credence to this interpretation in a letter dated 29 Jan. 1968, when, in a reference to the sexual temptation scene in *Prodigal*, he wrote: 'Hassocks seems rather short of "dark delights," & c.' (Unpublished, Britten–Pears Library).

[36] Many consider the cabaret scene in the *Furnace* and the 'temptation' scene in *Prodigal* to be the weakest moments in the parables. Kent Opera's production of *Prodigal* in 1994, however, rendered the appropriateness of the scene very effectively.

shade of evil.[37] Young mentions elsewhere that it is difficult to calculate now the intended effect of the devil in a drama to a medieval audience – laughter, fear or both. Plomer wrote:

> Very good news that you are grappling with the Prodigal & have found a suitable plainsong. I can well understand that the business of the temptations is knotty. About the character of the Tempter, I feel that it must be as remote as possible from the Pantomime Devil, itself derived from medieval grotesquery. Ought he not to be as suave, charming, and insinuating, and almost 'worldly,' as possible?[38]

Ironically, the concluding section of *Prodigal,* directly related to the image of repentance and return in the Rembrandt painting Britten claimed as *Prodigal's fons origo*, caused him the greatest difficulty. It is interesting that the painting, not Scripture, was cited as the original source. He was struck down by a flu-like virus, and five days into it he wrote to Pears, 'It's awfully frustrating just to lie here & feel wuzzy & sweaty, hot & cold, & not to be able to work at all.'[39] In March he was taken to hospital in Ipswich where he was diagnosed to have sub-acute (also known as infective) endocarditis, an infection of the innermost layers of the chambers and valves of the heart. It was not until 18 March that he was able to do any work at all.

However, it also appears that there was a genuine compositional block of some kind. Leslie Brown, who was Bishop of Ipswich at the time, confirmed to the author that Imogen Holst informed him that Britten was

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[37] II:406.
[38] Unpublished, 26 Nov. 1967 (Britten—Pears Library).
[39] Britten (Carpenter 1992:481).

'unable to bring the prodigal home, he was completely unable to compose'.[40] This inability appeared to be distinct from the consequences of his health, as Brown made clear. Inspired by Holst's comments Brown visited Britten, taking with him a distinctive statue of the reunited prodigal made by an African artist. The statue has a similarity to Henry Moore's style, with the son's arms, extended to almost twice the length, wrapped around the father's head in embrace (see Plate 1). Brown recalled that when Britten saw it 'he simply stared at it in amazement'. Pears, who also came in shortly afterwards, 'was also struck' by its appearance. Britten commented that he couldn't believe that the sculptor did not know the Rembrandt, but was stunned by the similarity of the two works. Brown claims that, from this moment, Britten found inspiration to complete the work.[41] This claim is supported by the fact of Britten's sudden subsequent completion of the *Prodigal dénouement*, the statue appearing to complement the Rembrandt as an artistic, rather than Scriptural, source. This might not seem so significant were it not for the fact that it was, precisely, a sculpture which had inspired Britten to write *Furnace*.

Be this as it may, the 'failure' in Britten's music to project a sufficiently celebratory conclusion is more difficult to rationalize than the subdued nature of the presentation of the temptations (which may be justified on the grounds of liturgical dramatic appropriateness as has been shown):

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[40] Interview, Hindhead, 22 Feb. 1999.
[41] Telephone conversation with the author at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. on 23 Feb. 1999. Brown stated that he could 'hear the statue' in the closing pages of the work.

Plate 1

Photographs of Leslie Brown's Prodigal Son Statue









> More difficult still is the final ensemble. The voices go up and down and around about, repeating 'was dead, and is alive; was lost, and is found' to the densest 'aggregate' in all three parables and the one closest to a discord that needs resolution; but nothing seems to focus or clinch, whether musically or dramatically. As in [*Furnace*] the climax is somehow missed (though everyone knows where it should be).[42]

Britten's concluding 'Cantate Domino' (Psalm 98) does not sound celebratory. Although, as a dance, it may be justified as approximating to *mai* in Nɔ, it is difficult to find a precedent in liturgical drama.[43] It seems, from every angle except deliberate irony, to be weak. This is all the more remarkable as it contains the only purely Biblical text constituting the final 'liturgical item' in any of Britten's parables, the composer apparently unable to find the inspiration he had previously ascribed to Scripture:

> In many oratorios, of course, where the words come from the liturgy or the Bible the composer has the greatest possible inspiration for his music.[44]

The routine of the scalic accompaniment and the intrusion of the Tempter's music on the trumpet at Fig. 73 contribute to an ineffective or even subversive effect, the depiction of the references to musical instruments positively placid compared to *Young Persons Guide to the Orchestra.*

In the closing sequence 'Was dead and is alive again, Was lost, and is found' the music also drifts far away from the 'home' of B^{b}, with a strong presence of $A^{7/9}$ linked to the 'gesture of persuasion' at Fig. 84 and E^{7} with the 'gesture of harmony' at Fig. $^{3}85$ before the close of the dramatic action in C

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[42] Holloway (Palmer 1984:222).
[43] Cooke 1998:131.
[44] Britten (Herbert 1979/89:117).

major at Fig. 85. That these relationships function as 'ghosts' within the texture is obvious, and the relationship of A and E against B^b immediately reminds one of the difference between the 'conversion' of Billy Budd during his 'Darbies' cadences into A and his execution on E as against the false salvation of Vere in B^b at the conclusion of *Budd*. In another context, the use of A and E points forward to *Venice*, where A is symbolic of Apollo/Tadzio and E of Dionysus/Aschenbach.

Summary conclusion on Britten's three parables for Church performance

Britten's official description 'parables for Church performance' should be taken at face value as his parables to Christians rather than for them (i.e. 'parables' in the Auden sense).[45] The aesthetic undermining of repentance in *Prodigal* is unsurprising given retrospective experience of *Wingrave* and *Venice*, and may even be fairly claimed to contribute in its own way to the 'understanding of all' about Britten's *oeuvre* as has been claimed for *Venice* itself. (*Prodigal* was composed in *Venice*, one again notes.) It is with this understanding of the parables of the 1960s that we now turn to Britten's final operas, in the early 1970s.

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[45] Britten's reference to 'Church parables/operas' elsewhere (Plomer called them 'Choperas') does not detract from this official designation in the published scores and libretti. Of course this does not negate audiences 'religious experience' of the parables in their own terms.

Chapter 10: *OWEN WINGRAVE*: spiritual *credo*

1. Towards a spiritual *Wingrave* genealogy

Owen Wingrave (1970) marked Britten's return to 'mainstream' opera, although breaking new ground as a commission for BBC television. Britten noted 'many close similarities' between *Wingrave* and *The Turn of the Screw*, beyond the obvious fact that they are based on Henry James stories (with libretti by Myfanwy Piper). He agreed they are 'companions'.[1] Piper noted:

> *Wingrave* was very near Britten's heart. He had thought of it as a subject for years and had spoken of it before he wrote the *War Requiem* (1961). When at last he wrote it, it came as a very personal coda to follow up the *Requiem*. His own beliefs had been in conflict with the patriotism of all proper Englishmen in 1939, just as Owen's had been with his family. And so Owen's hymn to peace [the Peace Aria] in Act II was deeply important. We talked a lot about it. However the words have come out, the music is an extraordinary affirmation of belief. It is, in a sense, the climax and the lesson of the piece – that Owen dies in the end does not, in spite of Shaw, invalidate the message.[2]

Piper's quasi-religious terminology in outlining Owen's difference from his family is telling: '*Wingrave* is about any inherited tradition and one individual's refusal to accept it', '[Owen] deliberately sets out on principle to blaspheme his family gods.'[3]

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[1] Britten/Mitchell (Palmer 1984:91).

[2] Piper (Herbert 1979/89:15). Tippett (Blyth 1981:71) dates the genesis of *Wingrave* to Britten's American period, i.e. pre-1942 (Piper's location of '1939' may be significant). Piper's reference to Shaw relates to his criticism of James' dramatic presentation of *Wingrave, The Saloon*, of background relevance to the present chapter, summarised: 'You [James] have given victory to death and obsolescence: I want you to give it to life and regeneration'. Piper commented 'But James would have none of such optimism' (*Ibid.*). Edel 1974:510–15, contains the whole relevant James–Shaw correspondence.

[3] W. Mann 1973:11; Raynor 1971:271, who adds that Britten 'regards [Kate Julian] as an angel of destruction' (273).

The precedent of the inversion of 'Abraham and Isaac' in *War Requiem* is especially germane in these respects, complemented by the fact that the *Requiem*'s width of stylistic reference 'is approached more strongly in *Wingrave* than any other Britten opera'.[4] 'International' war in the *Requiem* is also complemented by domestic 'war' in the opera. The 'translation' of *War Requiem*'s tritonal *diabolus* and 'Dies irae' fanfare 'archive' diminished triad into the war-like Wingrave family portrait archive reflects this shift, a new paradigm manifested in Owen's Peace Aria, his defiant 'pacifist' *credo* sung before those very portraits.

The technically pared-down focus on 'Christianised' material in the Parables enabled Britten to establish a new musical aesthetic in the 1970s in which 'Christianity' could be relocated in purely musical terms. In relation to *War Requiem*, the Parables can be viewed as a close reading of the Christian element in Britten's art. The protagonists of *Wingrave* and *Venice* reject conventional notions of Christianity, relocating spirituality fully in the private domain anticipated in *War Requiem*'s Wilfred Owen settings.

Thus *Wingrave* establishes Britten's (humanist) spiritual *credo* – crucially in Owen's Peace Aria – that is subsequently enacted in *Venice*. The emergence of Britten's passive-aggressive antagonism towards conventional notions of Christianity in the final operas can be viewed in a line extending back through *War Requiem* to the *Screw*, *Budd* and *Grimes*, and can be seen in

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[4] Mitchell 1995:433; Evans 1979/96:451. J. Evans (Palmer 1984:231–32) gives a genealogy of such references.

relation to the kind of liberal theology he identified in 1963 (beginning Chapter 7).

Wingrave was being drafted 'while Britten was much occupied with [...] the composition of the third church parable [...] in spring 1968.'[5] The problems Britten had with completing *Prodigal*'s (repentant) conclusion emerges against the simultaneous creation of a long-contemplated opera, totally antithetical to *Prodigal*'s subject: 'Now I am nothing, I bid you farewell. [...] I am finished with you all' (Owen before the family portraits leading into his Peace Aria, II.1, Figs. [2]246 and 256).

Britten's difficulty in clinching the musical depiction of the prodigal's repentance mirrors this chronology. A greater organic connection emerges between the male protagonists 'Albert Herring–Prodigal Son–Owen Wingrave' in which the 'Christianised' level of each work is subverted (*Herring* also dealing with fractured family relations).[6] The key here is the ultimate triumph of the profane over the sacred in Britten's later art.

2. Transferring two *Wingrave* themes: 'Paramore/War' and 'Peace'

Using Mitchell's model of *Wingrave* as two operas rolled into one (i.e. Act I = Opera 1; Act II = Opera 2), Act 1 is primarily concerned with Owen's strategic war with his family at Paramore.[7] Its theme is 'winning' rather than 'peace'.

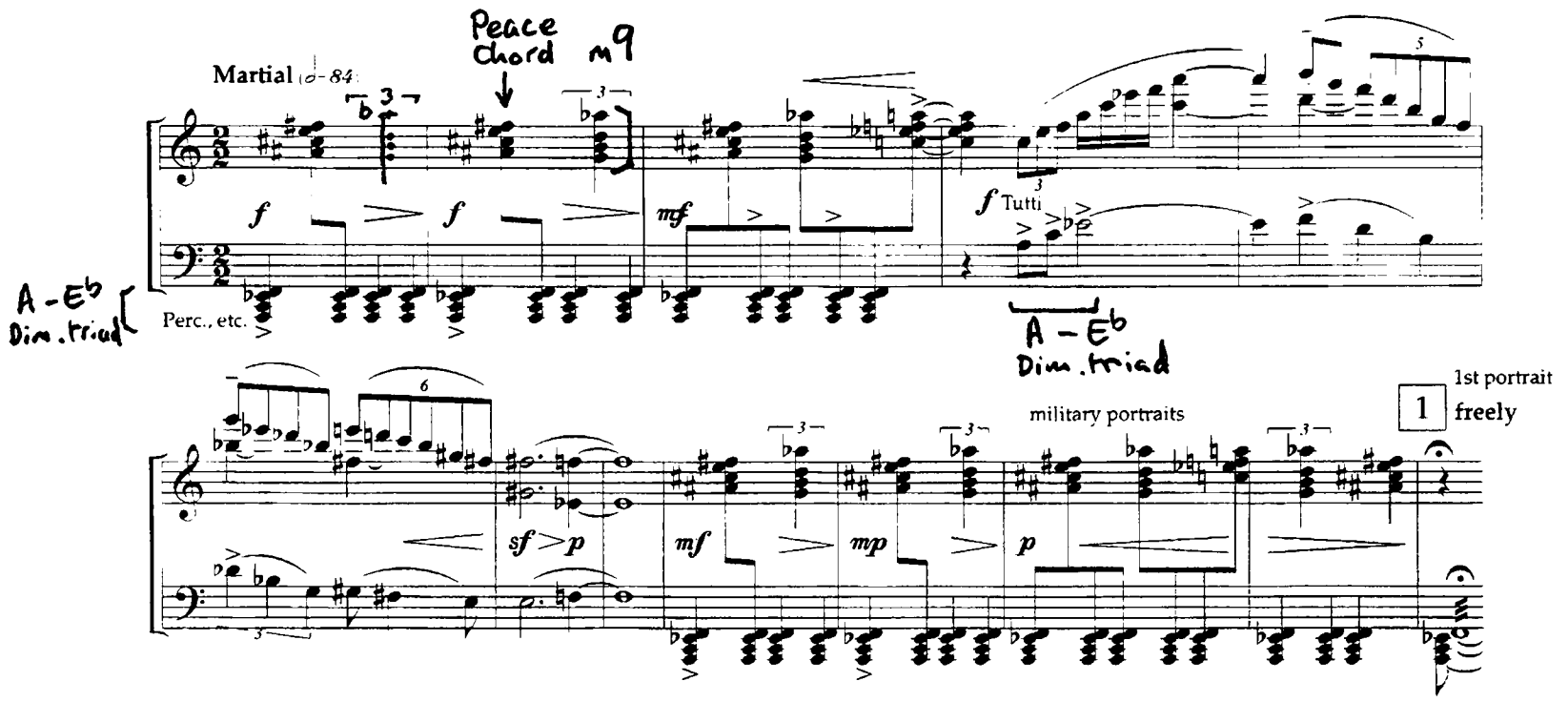
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[5] J. Evans (Palmer 1984:230).
[6] Mitchell 1995:425–27. Britten's own family fractures may be of background significance here (Chapter 1)
[7] Mitchell 1995:433–35.

Act 2 focuses on Owen's quest for a personal 'peace', a resolution of the war within himself, as indicated by the double-trajectory of the story.[8]

This transference from primarily outer to inner war is demonstrated in the transmutation of themes and sonorities, most notably derived from the Paramore Theme that opens the Prelude:

Ex. 10, i. The Paramore Theme



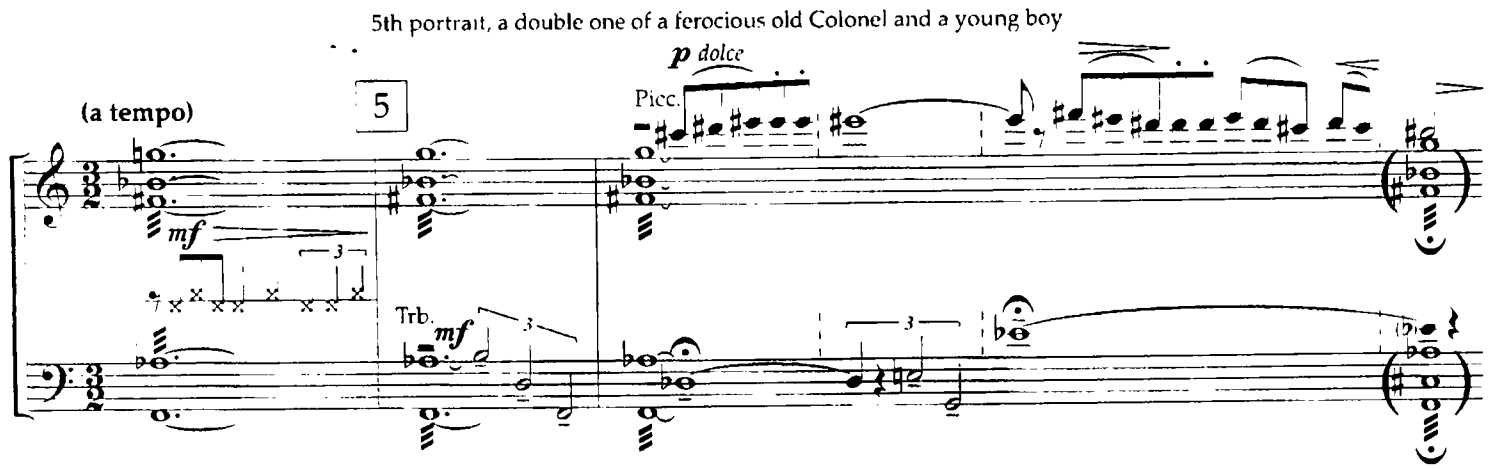
The Paramore Theme displays two *Grimes*-like features: the primary tritone A–E^{b} in the first chord and minor ninth in the third. The A–E^{b} tritone later reappears in the gamelan stratum of Owen's Peace Aria. The reprise of the A–E^{b} associated with *Curlew*'s resurrection 'vision' in these *Wingrave* contexts is ominous (as is its later significance to *Phaedra* and her suicide, Ex. 8, ii).

The Paramore Theme stands outside of the Wingrave portrait 'archive' that follows it, and is psychologically linked to concepts of 'fighting' and the pride that fuels such antagonism:

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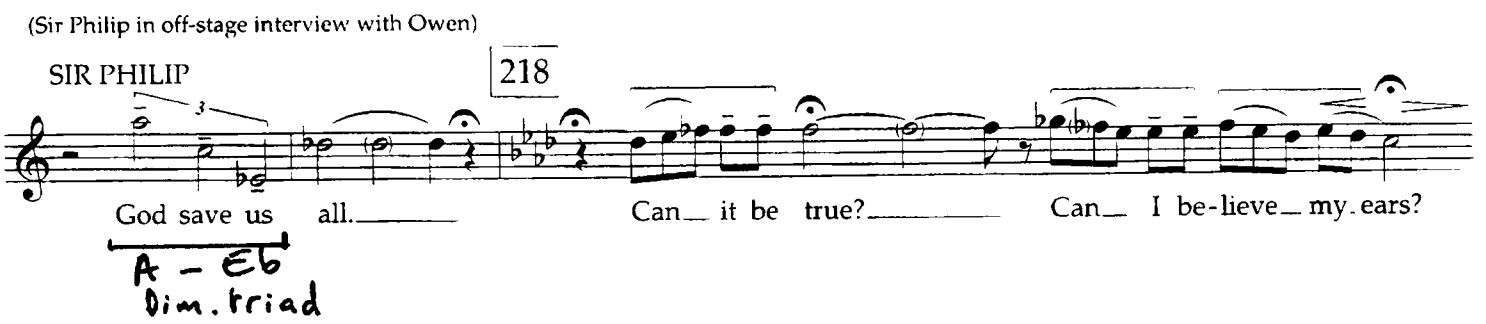
[8] Jordan and Kafalanos 1989:129–32.

Ex. 10, ii, a. 5th Portrait*

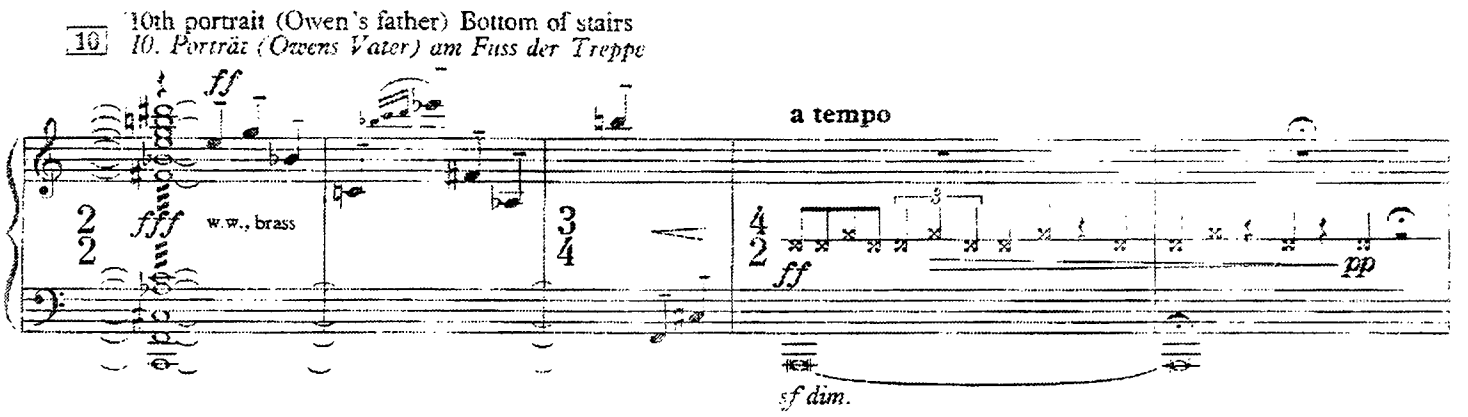


* The connection of piccolo sonority with the young boy is striking given the association the piccolo with the murdered Boy's Spirit in *Curlew*. In *Wingrave* it is a family member who murders the boy.

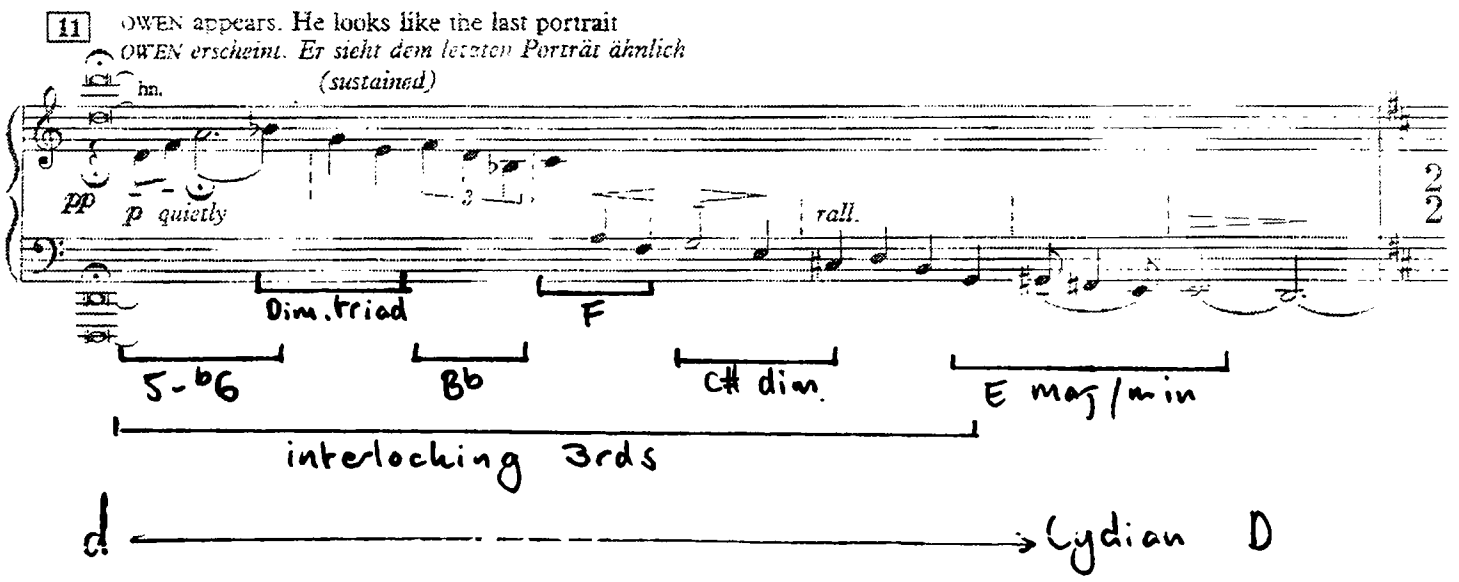
Ex. 10, ii, b. 5th Portrait music with text (II.1, Fig. 218)



Ex. 10, ii, c. 10th Portrait



Ex. 10, ii, d. Owen's Theme



As with the *Screw* Theme, each portrait introduces a new pitch that builds to a cumulative eleven-note aggregate from which Owen's D is missing (compare Ex. 10, ii with 6, i, a–c). The *Wingrave* portrait aggregate builds a great dominant chord on A resolving (or collapsing) into the D of Owen's Theme, prefiguring Owen's later relocation of his dominant family traditions (cf. the twelve-note 'dominant' A into D in the 'Sanctus' of *War Requiem*, above). The vital link between the Paramore Theme and Owen's later Peace Aria is in Coyle's quasi-religious formulation regarding the Wingrave clan

'Soldiering's their life, and their religion,/Owen their hope, heir to the Wingrave flag of glory' (I.1, Fig. [1]35 *et seq.*). The 'soldiering–religion' connection is instrumentally manifested in Britten's double role for percussion. *The Children's Crusade* (1969), composed as *Wingrave* was being created, features percussion as 'a complex combination of symbols of innocence (percussion as children's playthings) and horror (percussion as imitative sounds – the music of war).'[9]

This percussive connection between war and peace in *Wingrave* is enhanced by the common use of twelve-note propositions.[10] Such technical features, viewed as ideological dualities, may be linked with a manifestation of the 'guilty innocence' theme in Britten's work (i.e. 'Paramore' = guilt, 'Peace' = innocence). This has relevance to *Venice* where Aschenbach's 'guilty

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[9] Mitchell 1995:423, 432.

[10] 'The boys' (singing and hitting) made a tremendous impression of passion & sincerity along side the asinine [*sic.*] pomposity of the established church.' Britten (cited Carpenter 1992:488).

innocence' in relation to Tadzio is also identified by percussion (vibraphone sonority), contrasting the twelve-note propositions of his own character. A possible precedent here is the transference of the drums of war in *Budd* (II.1) to Vere's ruminations on Billy and 'temporary' secular salvation in the Epilogue (to which a libidinous element may be adjunct). However any illicit sexual ambiance, like that of *Grimes*, does not obtrude in *Wingrave*. Britten is more concerned with marking out, at close quarters, a spiritual difference that will lead to the ultimate disclosures of *Venice*.

That the Paramore Theme issues from the very fabric of the ancestral home and seat of Wingrave military–religious traditions is important in these respects:[11]

> 'Paramore' suggests a similar ambivalence [both consistent with and contrary to 'mores'] with regard to 'amore', hinting at the erotic conflict, which also finds expression in Jane Wingrave's passion for the army, with its fusion of desire and suffering, aggression and remorse. Owen's aunt appears to associate 'Paramore' with her family's 'paramount valour', but the word also contains an extra-familial glimpse of 'paramour', making it perhaps appropriate that in rejecting the army it is as if Owen has 'fallen in love with a low girl' or is engaged in 'corrupting the youth of Athens'. So compendious are the paradoxes of the Wingrave family that these hinted improprieties, as well as the coolness between Owen and Kate Julian, are not the result of Owen's assertion of his independence but, rather, a symptomatic involvement with the broken engagements and violent passages of the Wingrave erotic mythology.[12]

The line from James identified in this quotation, 'corrupting the youth of Athens', was annotated by Britten in his copy of *Wingrave* and it is a reference

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[11] Cf. Prelude; I.3, Fig. 94 *et seq.*; Interlude III: 'Paramore', and I.4, Fig. 128[2] *et seq.*

[12] Lustig (James 1992:x-xi). It should also be noted that, unlike the opera, James gives no obvious reason or motive for the Colonel's murder of his son.

to the homosexuality of Socrates.[13] The subject 'Sokrates und Alcibiades' from *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente*, can be connected with Owen's Peace Aria via the accompanying triads based on twelve notes. Aschenbach's 'Socrates' arietta (*Venice* II.16, Fig. 308, cf. Ex. 11, iii), sung after his recognition of his illicit love for Tadzio, employs Owen's Peace Chord in its harp accompaniment. In the Paramore Interlude strings conglomerate around configurations of Owen's later Peace Chord, a direct connection between 'Paramore' and 'peace' that is unmistakably direct (Interlude III, Fig. 98^{6} *et seq.*).

Additionally the Paramore Theme and its relation to Owen's scene in Hyde Park, where Britten employs a musical texture redolent of the homosocial male music anticipating lustful violence in *Lucretia*, is notable (compare Interlude I, Fig. 36 and I.2, Fig. $^{3}43$ *et seq.* with *Lucretia* I.1, Fig. 8 (cf. Ex. 3, i) both in g minor). *Lucretia* adumbrated the philosophy of tragic Classical 'fate' in a context of a possible Christian redemption regardless of the protagonist's state of repentance. Owen's reading of Shelley's 'Queen Mab' in Hyde Park, an alteration from Goethe in James, is key to comprehending Britten's passive–aggressive stance towards conventional religion. This stance is shared with *Lucretia* and made explicit in *War Requiem* ('Mab' was a source text for 'Strange Meeting'):[14] Owen's reading 'Look to thyself, priest [...], whether thy trade is falsehood!' clearly connects with the text of 'Agnus Dei'/'At a Calvary'. This identification is particularly telling

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[13] [Coyle to Lechmere] 'He oughtn't to talk to you that way. It's corrupting the youth of Athens. It's sowing sedition' (James 1964: 7, Britten–Pears Library).
[14] Bächman 1979:109, who describes 'Queen Mab' as an 'anti-religious poem'.

given the failure of conventional manifestations of Christianity in the *Screw* to prevent the evil at Bly. In this respect *Wingrave* can be viewed as Britten's ultimate personal rejection in artistic terms of that conventional religious tradition along with the military one. Militarism and conventional denominational 'Christianity' had been connected in Britten's mind since the 1930s, when he had rejected both. This is important in recognizing Britten's ultimately pessimistic view of the *Screw dénouement*, in spite of any 'Christianised' works during the interim.

The 'war' that informs *War Requiem* is certainly international in the political sense. However it is simultaneously a 'war' between the religion presented by State institutions and a claimed 'Greater love' involving sexual ambiguity. The alignment of 'peace' in *Wingrave* and 'homoerotic desire' in *Venice* can now be placed in a strong tradition of Britten criticism viewing both qualities as belonging, more or less, to the same field of meaning in his aesthetic universe.[15]

The presence of the trumpet motive introduced in the Paramore Interlude, symbolizing 'the evil spirit of the house [...] and more particularly, the image of the haunted room where the tragedy narrated in the Ballad was enacted; and is to be re-enacted', is a component of the Ballad itself (II.1).[16] 'Evil', in these Paramore contexts, can be clarified as 'collective guilt' in the *Grimes* tradition. As with Britten's use of percussion, fanfares often signify

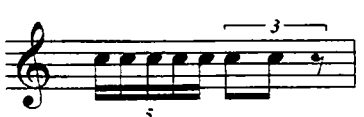
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[15] E.g. Brett, Carpenter, Hindley, Holloway, McClatchie, Wilcox.
[16] Mitchell 1995:432.

double-meanings, connected both to militarism/war and 'evocations, nostalgic or even ironic, of a natural order, whether sublime or inexorable'.[17] This fanfare and its association with both Paramore (Act I, with 'guilt' emphasis) and the Ballad (Act II, with 'innocence' emphasis) will be termed the Judgement Fanfare, later given a text by Sir Philip, 'I'll court martial you' accompanied by its rotation through twelve notes as the family pass judgment on Owen (I.5, Fig. 144).[18]

The Fanfare reaches its (vocal) apotheosis in the final confrontation between Owen and Kate as she dares him to sleep in the haunted room (II.1, Fig. 273 *et seq.*):

Ex. 10, iii. Judgement Fanfare



The rhythmic precedent for the Judgement Fanfare is found in the 5th Portrait, where the piccolo, inscribing Motive *z*, represents the young boy killed by the Old Colonel, the subject of the Act 2 Ballad (Ex. 10. ii, a). This connection is made especially clear when both boy theme and Judgment Fanfare are juxtaposed as Owen confronts the ghosts of the boy and old man at the end of his Peace Aria (II.1, Figs. 258-259[2]). The Judgement Fanfare erupts powerfully, even defiantly, at Owen's final words, to Kate, 'Come turn your key' to a blazing C major Peace Chord as he enters the haunted room (Fig. 279).

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[17] Evans 1979/96:91.

[18] E–$C^{\#}$–$A^{\#}$–$G^{\#}$–B–D–C–E^{b}–G^{b}–F–G–A[–A^{b}].

In *Wingrave*, words traditionally associated with Christianity are constantly aligned with the Wingraves: 'duty', 'obedience', 'discipline', 'sacrifice' and 'belief' (e.g. Kate and Lechmere's flirtatious 'For me a man/girl must believe' and Owen's later bitter response to the strains of the ballad theme 'And with his friend, young Lechmere played...'). Against Owen's reading of 'Queen Mab', Miss Wingrave announces that the Wingraves are 'Protectors of God's given truth' (I.2, Fig. 47^{2}). Sir Philip prays 'God bless the Queen and this house' as the family sit to dine (I.7). In the expression of his private thoughts at the dining table Owen recognizes 'Obey! Believe! Accept! That is all I need to do, but the orders are wrong' to a B^{b} major triad (I.7, Fig. $^{5}177$). B^{b} is a direct connection with Vere's 'salvation' in *Budd* and the Father's home in *Prodigal*. This is the very triad that will commence his Peace Aria (having been a component of his Theme, Ex. 10, ii, d)..

However, the outstanding single quality that seems to be questioned in *Wingrave* is that of 'glory', the word occurring in the libretto at least 16 times.[19] In the opening scene, itself a miniature glorification of 'glory', Owen questions 'Is glory everything?' over an $F^{\#}$ pedal (Fig. 23^{9}). Subsequently he asserts 'Glory? An illusion' and, before finally entering the haunted room, 'Unreal, ridiculous! You would sacrifice to a false idea of glory' (I.2, Fig. 56, and II.1, Fig. 268 respectively). As addressed in the chapter on *Lucretia*, 'glory'

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[19] 'Glory' recalls *Gloriana*, the conclusion of which is antithetical to *Wingrave* and *Venice*.

is a problematic theme in Britten's *oeuvre* due to its connection with worldly vainglory and the nature of the sin of pride.

In *Wingrave*, the enactment of Divine Judgement is gloried against with a defiance borne of the Owen settings in *War Requiem*:

> In spite of his intelligence and liberal stand, Owen succumbs to the simplest human pride when, angered by Kate's taunt that he is a coward, he agrees to be locked in the haunted room. Owen is no better than a soldier duped into war by the pressure of glory, no better than the other members of his family, since, like them, he succumbs to pride in the family tradition of courage.[20]

Owen's 'The servants, my old friends, know I'm in disgrace' indicate his self-awareness (I.6, after Fig. 162). The chromatic triplet roulades that nervously thread through this music, continuing in Interlude IV as the servants prepare the dinner table for the ensuing dinner scene (I.7), are gestural descendents of *Grimes* Interlude II, I.2 'storm' music and III.1 dance music.

Owen, in spite of his apparent 'difference', is ultimately beholden to the same system of vainglory as his family. The root of both is unrepentant pride with a possible adjunct illicit sexual ambiguity. This reading shows *Wingrave* to echo *Grimes*, where Peter and the Borough are united in their shared pride and refusal to repent, often the root cause of both personal and international warfare. The sacrifices of Peter and Owen do not 'make sacred', and, in this sense, *Grimes* leads into the 'Christianised' concern of Britten's operatic sequence just as *Wingrave* leads out of it. However what is new in *Wingrave* is Britten's final separation of his particular pacifism from any direct

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[20] Corse 1987:114.

connection with the Christian tradition, even though the argument for its singular roots in Christ's teaching may be tenuously maintained, placing his pacifism firmly in the realm of the agnostic humanist in a dramatic manifestation of *War Requiem*'s theme.

This paradigm shift in *Wingrave* is an essential spiritual pivot in the emergence of *Venice*, where clear notions of Christian redemption in the text are rejected outright. It also frames the ambiguities in Owen's death: although his pacifism is presented as 'better' than the war-like Wingraves in that Britten presents him as more-or-less Christ-like, there is simultaneously something inherently in its admixture that prevents him from being victorious (cf. Shaw). In other words, although the kind of bigoted, hypocritical 'religious militarism' presented by the Wingraves is rejected in Owen's Peace Aria, it is not possible for him to defiantly vanquish the judgement rhetoric of Biblical Christianity. He cannot be truly different because, like his family, he is unregenerate.

After the model of *Grimes*, this is a point that emerges, not through his confrontation with his family directly, but with Coyle. Coyle and his wife love Owen like a father and mother, and represent unconditional love on some level that is beyond Owen and certainly beyond his family. Owen 'wins the grave' in that he dies for a better *credo* than that of the Wingrave tradition, with its politicised form of religion. However, he simultaneously 'owes the grave' in that the passive–aggressive qualities informing that very *credo* are intrinsically 'at war' with the unconditional love of Biblical Christianity, as

exampled in the Coyles (cf. Collatinus in *Lucretia*). The adjunct sexual issue is the missing detail in this scenario to be revealed in *Venice*. The relationship of this aspect of *Wingrave* to the ambiguous *dénouement* of the *Prodigal* is critical to this spiritual level.

In Britten's earlier operas a redemptive element, ultimately rejected, forms an essential 'Christianised' level of 'judgement rhetoric' experienced musically. This has been identified in Ellen Orford (*Grimes*), Collatinus (*Lucretia*), Billy (*Budd*), Elizabeth (*Gloriana*), and at one remove in Mrs. Grose (the *Screw*). (*War Requiem* is a more complex case because the fusion of 'In Paradisum' with 'Let us sleep now' suggests a temporary musical salvation compromised in the works closing moments). In *Wingrave* the Coyles provide redemptive possibility. Owen's initial rejection of Coyle himself, in the first scene, does not result in Coyle's rejection of Owen. The key regions Britten gives the Coyles conforms to the A–E of Ellen Orford and Billy Budd, proving significant in *Venice*.

In Act I we witness Owen's first death both to Wingrave tradition and politicised religion (I.2). In Act II, on the spiritual level, we witness his second death to Biblical Christianity. These two deaths, in which he simultaneously wins and owes the grave, are actualised in the haunted room: his physical death 'on the battlefield' of 'Paramore' against his family, and his spiritual death 'on the battlefield' against Christian truth via his internal 'Paramore' which anticipates Aschenbach in *Venice*.

3. *Wingrave* and the cycle of fifths: war in the family

Table 10 clarifies Britten's resurgent symbolic operatic use of key and pitch regions related to the cycle of fifths. Some connections are more consistent than others and the scheme is general rather than dogmatic (e.g. the predominant use of E^b in II.1, Figs 263–79 is between Owen and Kate and does not, apparently, directly include Sir Philip):[21]

Table10. Key/pitch 'relations' in *Wingrave* (all contexts highly chromatic)

Mrs. Coyle[22]	E			
Spencer Coyle[23]	A			
	D	Owen[24]	d	
			G/g	Mrs. Julian[25]
			g/G^b	Kate Julian[26]
			C	'Key' (II.1, Fig. 279)
		[chromatic]	F and G/g	Miss Wingrave[27]
			B^b	Lechmere[28]
			E^b	Sir Philip[29]

The most significant relations here are the Coyles who are clearly portrayed as compassionate onlookers and, although they cannot approve Owen's point of view, do not condemn him for having one that is different from theirs. (The connection of Mrs. Coyle to the Ellen Orford type was made

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[21] J. Evans (Palmer 1984:235).
[22] Mrs. Coyle (E): Figs. 64, 74, 83, (ironically between Owen and Kate at 125), 152–57, 211.
[23] Coyle (A): Figs. 32 (aria), 151 (aria reprise), 286.
[24] Owen (D/d): Figs. 11, 12, 195.
[25] Mrs. Julian (G/g): Figs. 101, 227 *et seq.* (aria).
[26] Kate Julian (g/G^b): Figs. 105, 227, 291.
[27] Miss Wingrave ([chromatic]): Figs. 45, 111, 236 (the pitch assignation in Evans')
[28] Lechmere (B^b): Figs. 16, 19, 22.
[29] Sir Philip (E^b): Figs. 174, 178, 181, 183, 188, 193, 215, 222

at the time of the *Wingrave* premiere.[30]) Musical characteristics such as scalic forms and Lydian mode (e.g. Coyle's Lydian A aria in I.1, 'Straight out of school they come to me', and its subsequent I.6 reprise 'I own to a deep interest in the boy') and chains of thirds (e.g. the scene at the Coyles house in I.3 and their opening music in I.6) may be connected with much of Ellen's music in *Grimes*, although the Coyle marriage suggests a development of application (e.g. fatherly as well as motherly love).

The Coyles have the mature balance of truth and compassion altogether lacking in the Wingraves and Julians in Britten's reading. Indeed one early commentator ventured 'could such a kindly man as this Coyle really be an experienced military man?'[31] The connection of the Coyles Lydian A and E major music to the sharper regions of the D/d of Owen's Theme is striking in itself, indicative of relationships of mutual love and respect through use of the cycle of fifths. In this special sense the Coyles, although martial in persuasion, represent a different outlook to the cold, unbending dogma of the Wingrave tradition. However the Coyles do not appear able to ultimately offer Owen a way out of his dilemma.

Critics have noted that in his portrayal of the Coyles 'Britten was affectionately portraying Frank and Ethel Bridge, a perspective Myfanwy Piper agreed was "very likely".'[32] Owen's Peace Chord is directly anticipated

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[30] Sadie 1971:665.
[31] W. Mann 1971:19.
[32] Carpenter 1992:509; Whittall 1982/90:250.

by the motherly Mrs. Coyle, especially notable given the Bridges role in the formation of Britten's pacifism (I.6, Figs. 146–47[2]).

In such familial contexts it is interesting to note that Britten's musical gesture for the 10th portrait of Owen's father greatly resembles that of the disintegrative climax of the *Sinfonia da Requiem* 'Dies irae', *Sinfonia* being dedicated 'in memory of my parents' (compare Prelude, Figs. 10–11 with *Sinfonia*, Fig. 34[6] *et seq.*). This 'Dies irae' disintegration is followed by a 'Requiem aeternam' in which the harmonies of the string litany at Fig. 40 contain the *Wingrave* Peace Chord, gesturally suggesting a profound dislocation between Father and son against the Wingrave model. Additionally Owen's Theme and the revelation of his rejection of Wingrave tradition to Coyle occur immediately after the 10th portrait of his father. Both Owen's theme and the opening of the first scene are in the nominal Lydian D of the *Sinfonia* finale.

4. Owen's Peace Aria, the Peace Chord and the *dénouement*: dualism and imminent collapse

a. The Peace Aria text

The genealogy of the role of a militant 'peace' in Britten's aesthetic originates in the pacifist works of the 1930s during his association with Auden. Tippett's dating of the genealogy of Britten's interest in *Wingrave* to his pre-1942 'Auden period' accentuates the relevance of the Auden connection. Therefore,

authoritative views on Auden's concept of 'peace' may shed light Britten's approach to the term and its significance in *Wingrave*:

> When it actually occurs, peace is an evasion of real barriers and cannot endure; when it does not occur, peace is the longed-for state of real unity that can never be achieved. A real and stable peace is unattainable, for man's ordinary condition is one of anxiety and war.[33]

These dualistic distinctions resonate in *Wingrave*, applying both to Owen's relationship with the family and, especially in Act II, within himself. The relevance of this application of Auden's aesthetics to later Britten, aside from Britten's own significant comment 'Auden is in all my operas', is ramified in *Wingrave* and *Venice* criticism:

> There's the name too, is there not? *Win-grave*, a curious conflation, itself juxtaposing the two poles of experience in the opera: triumph and defeat; life and death; war and peace; love and hate; fear and courage. Owen, ultimately, in terms of courage emerges victor; but what he has won is a grave for himself. The 'peace' chord likewise encapsulates the same enigma, the same ambiguity.[34]

Although not redeemed in Christian terms, a point made more poignant in the Parable aftermath, there is certainly a passive-aggressive position in relation to Christianity discernable in Owen's Peace Aria. Piper called it a 'hymn to peace', and the structure strongly echoes the Apostle Paul's celebrated paean to Love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8:[35]

> OWEN
> For peace is not lazy but vigilant,
> Peace is not acquiescent but searching,
> Peace is not weak, but strong like a bird's wing bearing its weight in the dazzling air.

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[33] Mendelson 1981:38.
[34] Mitchell 1995:336.
[35] Herbert 1979/89:15.

Peace is not silent, it is the voice of love…
Peace is not confused, not sentimental, not afraid.
Peace is positive, is passionate, committing–more than war itself.
Only in peace can I be free… [36]

* * * * *

1 COR. 13:4-8
Love is patient, love is kind.
It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,
it keeps no record of wrongs.
Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
Love never fails.[37]

In the *Budd* Epilogue the terms 'peace' and 'love' are interchangeable in connection with the characters mis-appropriation of the Benediction:

VERE
But [Billy] has saved me, and blessed me,
And the love that passes understanding has come to me.[38]

Coyle's benediction on Owen before his Peace Aria, 'Then sleep now, and God bless you' (Fig. ^{2}242), echoing Mrs. Coyles 'Good night, my dear boy./ May heaven direct you right' (240^{3}), stands in a similar tradition, not least in its conflation of a particular type of blessing on sleep adumbrated in 'In paradisum'/'Let us sleep now' of *War Requiem*. Owen's pithy Peace Aria statements can also be related to the pacifist anthem *Voices of Today* (1965), the radio cantatas of the 1930s *The World of the Spirit* (1938) and *The Company of*

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[36] *Wingrave* (II.1, Fig. 246, *et seq.*).
[37] *Bible* (N.I.V.).
[38] According to (cf. McClatchie 1996:61), the simultaneous interchangeability of 'peace' and (homosexual) 'love' in *Wingrave* is matched, by the interchangeability of 'military', 'heterosexual' and, by extension, 'Christian'. Although the Wingraves consider Owen 'unmanly', the main agents of their 'patriarchy' are the women.

Heaven (1937), and 'roots in [Britten's] settings of biblical injunctions that formed part of his church-going experience as a boy.'[39]

In this religious sense Britten's use of the B^{b} major key signature and triad to initiate the Peace Aria is significant: the use of B^{b} major in relation to concepts of salvation reach back through the home of the Father and his sons – symbolizing the Kingdom of Heaven – in *Prodigal;* the B^{b} as the creatures enter and leave the ark in *Noye;* the B^{b} context of Canticle III, *Still Falls the Rain;* the equivocal 'temporary salvation' context of Vere's B^{b} triad in the *Budd* Epilogue; and Grimes' rejection of the salvation offered to him by Ellen in *Grimes* (II.1).[40] The summatory role of the Peace Aria triads is significant in these religious respects.

b. Dualism in the triads with twelve-note roots in the Peace Aria

The dualistic implications of Owen's 'peace', in light of the *dénouement,* has also been noted in relation to the triadic sequence which is based on a series of twelve-note roots:[41]

B^{b}–d–F–C–e–G–B–E^{b}–$f^{\#}$–A–$C^{\#}$–*A^{b}

*= Peace Chord

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[39] Mitchell (Cooke 1999:190).

[40] Additionally it may be felt that the dualism, perhaps even schizophrenia, of 'peace' and the family ghosts in Owen's Peace Aria echoes the reflection/neurosis of Grimes' 'Great Bear and Pleiades' aria.

[41] In comparing the operatic Owen with James', McClatchie 1996:73 notes: 'This [Britten's] Owen is defeated. Unmistakably. [...] Britten's return to the Wingrave ballad for the final music of the opera itself problematises any argument in favour of Owen's victory'.

> Their triadic formation tells us one thing; their roots [...] tell us another. As a result, there is an inexorable and awful logic about the *dénouement*: Owen's confidence in peace was after all based on an illusion: far from being banished, violence was there all the time.[42]

This reading echoes the manner in which the twelve-note proposition of the opening portrait 'archive' is completed by Owen's D: although melodically (modally) he is different from the chromaticism of the portrait themes he is, nonetheless, connected with them at his core.

As has been shown, Britten's use of twelve-note propositions symbolize an 'all' or a 'cosmos', a complete universe, that is connected both to human will and religious 'laws' (Chapter 6 *et seq.*). The specific precedent of *War Requiem*'s 'Te decet', where the boys' voices are accompanied in the organ (Fig. 3) to the triadic sequence F–D–E^{b}–$c^{\#}$–e–$F^{\#}$–b–a–$g^{\#}$–B^{b}–g–C, may be significant to the attempted sanctification of an illicit impulse concealed in the Peace Aria. This is amplified in 'Sokrates und Alcibiades' (*Sechs Hölderlin Fragmente*) where Britten accompanied the text about Greek male-boy love to the triadic sequence D–$F^{\#}$–B–A–C–B^{b}–A^{b}–G–E^{b}–F–D^{b}–E–[D] and, in the *Dream*, where the (heterosexual) lovers awaken to the sequence A–G–A^{b}–G^{b}–B^{b}–C–D–B–E^{b}–E–$C^{\#}$–F.[43] This 'libidinous' connection to the Tristan Chord configurations of Aschenbach's twelve-note propositions opening *Venice* are further evidence in this respect.

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[42] Mitchell 1995:326.

[43] Evans 1971:428 claims that the *Budd* Interview Chords 'offers a closer emotional parallel' than the *Dream* triads, even though the *Budd* triads are not based on twelve-note roots. The contrast between homo and heterosexual love in his statement is striking in the Peace Aria context.

The exclusively major triadic sequences of 'Sokrates' and the *Dream* and the admixture of major and minor triads in 'Te decet' are also interesting in relation to the combination of major and minor triads accompanying Owen's Aria: the positive or affirmative qualities of the exclusively major sequences may be contrasted with the ambiguous, sacrificial aspects of 'Te decet' and Owen's subsequent death.[44] (Britten's comments that the boys' choir symbolize 'boys who are going to be killed, and you don't like it' in the 'Offertorium' of War *Requiem* may have relevance here, especially as they are still singing liturgical Latin.)[45] The profound ambiguities thus presented in the Peace Aria by the triads are compounded by the fact that the 'hateful' Kate's accompanying music has previously utilized distinctive triadic structures in its accompaniment.[46]

This dualism of meaning between the quality of the individual triads and the unfolding of the twelve-tone roots may be accentuated if the triads themselves are heard as an evocation of the tolling of bells.[47] Such a reading would place the Peace Aria in a tradition extending back to the church scene of *Grimes* Interlude III and the religious implications for Billy in the Interview Chords of *Budd*. In *Grimes*, the pure Christianity of Ellen (and the silent boy apprentice, John), evoked by the 'tolling' opening horn ground, is pitted

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[44] The twelve minor chords on twelve roots in *Gloriana* (III.1,3), accompanying the Queen and Essex's final duet before his execution supports this interpretation.
[45] Britten DECCA 1999: CD 2, track 9.
[46] I.4, Figs. 106 and 124 *et seq.*; I.6, Fig. 149 as Mrs. Coyle refers to Kate; I.7 *et seq.* and 171-4 in the exchanges between Kate and Sir Philip hinting, perhaps, at the 'illicit' family traces at Paramore' II.1, Fig. 220, Kate's predominantly major triads (cf. Peace Aria) contrasting with Coyle's preceding minor sequences; extended triads at 230 *et seq.*
[47] McClatchie 1996:71, fn. 39.

against the actual bells of fake Borough denominational religion. This may be more subtly applied to Billy's Darbies Aria and Vere's Epilogue responses to the Interview Chords, Billy's being 'eternal' (A), Vere's being 'temporary' (B^{b}, the 'key' opening Owen's Peace Aria).

Thus the distinction between 'real' bells and Britten's musical evocation of bells is significant dramaturgically. From *Grimes* to *Venice* – not neglecting *War Requiem* – Britten's bell-scenes carry implications for Owen's Peace Aria: the 'real' Church bell heard at the conclusion of 'The Ballad' that opens II.1, which is unquestionably connected with the Wingrave tradition, is quite different from the evocation of bells in Owen's Peace Aria. In simultaneous distinction from these 'Western' triadic 'bells', there are Eastern bells in the gamelan stratum of Owen's Peace Aria, relevant to the *selisir* patterns in the *Grimes* Interlude – related to the Grimes and Ellen Motives – and Tadzio's music in *Venice*.[48]

This observation may be extended back to Britten's derivations from oriental sources in the parables and forward to his final opera:

> Even if the evidence of earlier works – especially *Wingrave*, in which the tuned percussion represents peace (an ideal equally dear to the composer) – were insufficient, Britten's choice of percussion to represent a quest of great psychological magnitude and autobiographical significance in [*Venice*] eloquently demonstrates his personal attachment to the gamelan style.[49]

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[48] This aspect is also highly relevant to *The Prince of the Pagodas*.
[49] Cooke 1998:249.

This combination of bell-like triads representing a kind of illicit love and twelve-note roots signifying a 'cosmic law' or 'will' creates a complex ambiguity of love and judgement that also applies to the gamelan stratum.

c. Dualism within the gamelan-derived layer of the Peace Aria

In terms of the benedictory aspect of Owen's Peace Aria *credo*, a direct link has been made between the 'Sanctus' ('Holy, holy, holy') gamelan sonorities of *War Requiem* and *Wingrave* extending to *Venice*:

> [The 'Sanctus' ratifies] the constant association in Britten's output between gamelan sonorities and unattainable goals. In later works, this connection was to be made still more explicit, with the gamelan sonorities in *Wingrave* suggesting both the allure and essential remoteness of the peace towards which the eponymous hero strives, while in *Venice* they represent the attractiveness of the Polish boy Tadzio and imply his fundamental incompatibility with Aschenbach. The *Wingrave* usage is directly prophesied in the ['Sanctus'], the percussion tremolos being pointedly restricted to the two tritonal pitches C and $F^{\#}$ which have already been linked to the seemingly unattainable 'requiem aeternam'.[50]

'Fundamental incompatibility' is the key here, marking the aesthetic boundaries of imminent but unattainable synthesis of Christianity (West = triads and twelve-tone roots) with states of non-repentance (East = gamelan-derived techniques and heterophony) that Britten required in his later music as a technical *fons et origo*, even in his most apparently secular dramaturgies.

> However it has also been shown that there is an incompatibility within the gamelan stratum itself – a point accentuated by the aural connection between the gamelan-derived sound of the Paramore

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[50] Cooke 1996:70.

> Theme and the Peace Aria – and this has been shown to have relevance to the complex symbolic ambiguities of the Aria:[51]
>
> Yet the gamelan music does not solve the western composer's dilemma, poised between tonal and post-tonal. Rather, it is above the battle, and it is this detachment, this seductive illusion of fulfilment all too successfully masking the true challenge, the imminent catastrophe, that makes its role in Britten's last two operas so disturbing.[52]

Triadic dualism is reflected in the gamelan stratum, as well as the initial preservation of the Wingrave A–E^{b} tritone. The consistency of Britten's technical explication of the intrinsic lack of coherence in Owen's *credo* extends to the single sound image of the Peace Chord.

d. Dualism in the Peace Chord

That the final A^{b} triad of the Peace Aria is also the Peace Chord (i.e. the fifth-plus-tone), in the form of a cadence in the wedge-shape first introduced at Fig. 236, is notable. Britten's use of the Peace Chord extends, via the final chord of Berg's *Violin Concerto*, back to his admiration of the final chord of Mahler's *Das Lied von Der Erde*, both having a notable impact on the young Britten. He observed that '[Mahler's] final chord is printed on the atmosphere. At the moment I can do no more than bask in its Heavenly light – & it is worth having lived to do that.'[53] What is particularly notable, however, is a precedent for the Peace Chord in the accompaniment of Abraham's blessing of Isaac before sacrificing him in Canticle II, Isaac: 'Kneeling on my knees

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[51] Cooke 1998:227–28.
[52] Whittall 1996:6–7. Cooke identifies the same problem (Mitchell 1987:115–16).
[53] Mitchell–Reed 1991:493.

two, your blessing on me spread.' Abraham: 'My blessing, dear son, give I thee/ And thy mothers' with heart free;/ The blessing of the Trinity,/ My dear son, on thee light.'[54]) The benediction of peace precedes an averted act of sacrifice, a situation inverted in the 'Parable of the old man and the young' in *War Requiem*. Such ambiguities may also be detected in Britten's employment of the Peace Chord in the ballad singer's gittern accompaniment in *Gloriana* (III.2). The Queen's peace and the peace of England become dependent upon Essex's execution. Such 'peace-through-violent death' precedents are directly relevant to *Wingrave*.

Owen's Peace Chord may be heard as a correction of its inversion in the earlier Paramore music (Interlude II). However it should also be noted that the A^{b} Peace Chord at the end of the Peace Aria belongs to the flat side of Owen's d/D, therefore not only in a tritonal relation to Owen's (living) portrait but actually in the key region of Wingrave tradition. This point is ramified in the Peace Aria B^{b} opening 'key' and triad and the notable use of the E^{b} triad as an isolated punctuation in Owen's *agitato* section at Fig. 253^{9}, the cycle of fifths again a structural feature. Through such strategies of inversion and key Britten is able to make the Peace Chord encapsulate the dilemma: Owe–the–grave/Win–the–grave.[55]

In relation to the *Screw* A^{b} is the region of the Ghosts, a connection made more potent by the musico-dramatic point that Owen is killed in an

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[54] As an adult, Britten, by his own confession, did not believe in the Trinity (App.2).
[55] Mitchell 1995:336.

encounter with the Wingrave Ghosts in the haunted room. Indeed the final chord of the opera at Fig. 294, with Kate's announcement of Owen's death and Sir Philip's response, is a descending diminished triad on E underpinned by an A^{b}. Sir Philip's words 'My boy!', as he apprehends Owen's dead body, were imposed on Piper by Pears:

> 'I didn't think it was very successful – it's not really dramatic.' [Piper] was aware that Pears had addressed Britten in these words in his early letter to him.[56]

It may fairly be claimed that Owen's final blazing Peace Chord on C mitigates the flatness to a degree as he enters the haunted room for the night in response to Kate's challenge (Fig. 279, 'Come, turn your key!'). However such sudden, violent radiance flares up too briefly and is too compromised in the larger harmonic context to prevent a mood of prevailing flatness (cf. the *dénouements* of *Budd* and the *Screw*).

e. *Dénouement*

Much about the *dénouement* has already been discussed above. However a new feature is the closeness of Britten's gestures for time passing in the Coyles bedroom and the rondo-like refrain of 'Epilogue: Our Hunting Fathers' from the work of that name (Ex. 10, iv, a–c).

The *Fathers* refrain is derived from the hunting motive of the penultimate setting 'Dance of Death: Hawking for the Partridge' (Fig. 31 *et*

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[56] Cited Carpenter 1992:513. In the Auden/Isherwood play *The Ascent of F6* (1937), for which Britten composed the incidental music, Mrs. Ransom's cry 'My boy, at last!' as her son arrives at the top of the mountain, only to die at her feet is a further connection between *Wingrave*, Auden and the 1930s. (Auden (*PDW*) 1988:353.

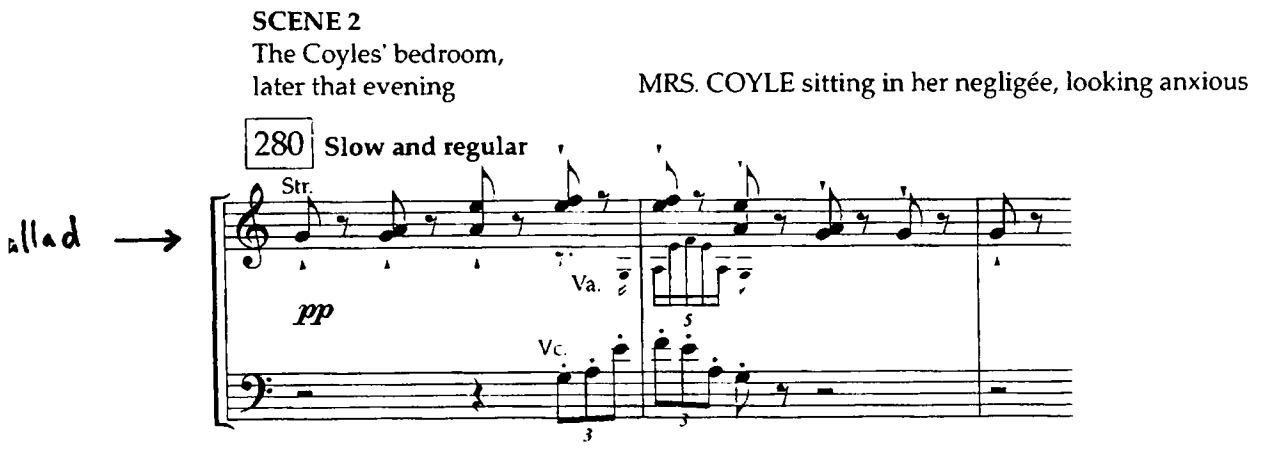
seq.) in a manner echoed by the *Wingrave* music, a heterophonic realization of the Ballad phrases after the Parable manner. What is striking is the 'child-like' nature of the triplet-rhythm upper strata in both examples against the steady quaver punctuation in the lower register. Not only is this so, but the text of the Auden setting could not be more appropriate to the ramifications of the theme of *Wingrave*:

> Our hunting fathers told the story
> Of the sadness of the creatures,
> Pitied the limits and the lack
> Set in their finished features;
> Saw in the lion's intolerant look,
> Behind the quarry's dying glare.
> Love raging for the personal glory
> That reason's gift would add,
> The liberal appetite and power,
> The rightness of a god.

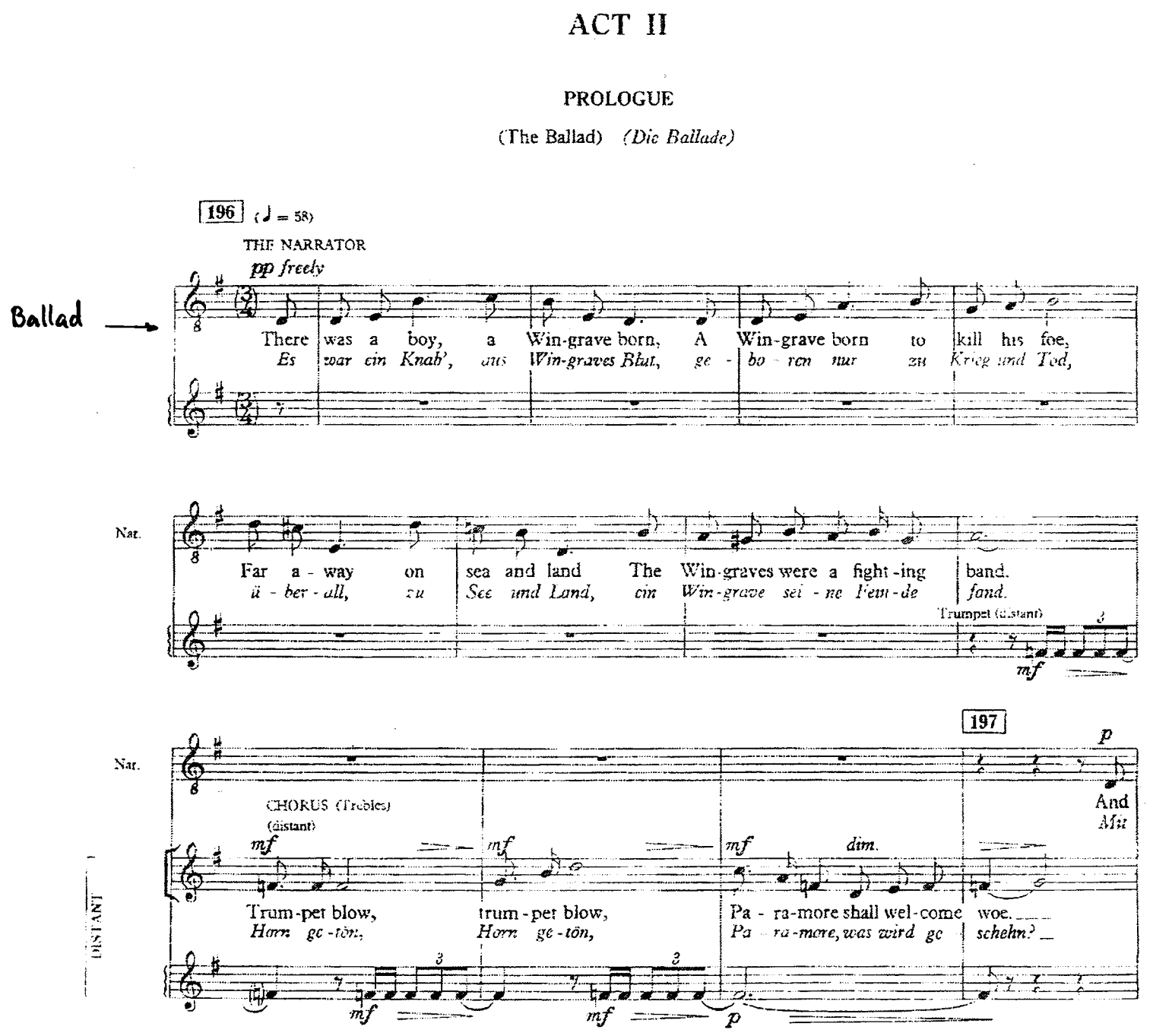
Ex. 10, iv, a. *Fathers*, 'Our Hunting Fathers' (instrumental refrain)



Ex. 10, iv, b. *Wingrave* (II.2, instrumental refrain)



Ex. 10, iv, c. *Wingrave* Ballad Theme



The vocal line 'O Pride so hostile to our Charity' obsessively threads throughout the instrumental accompaniment of the *Fathers* 'Epilogue' erupting in a full closing statement of the major–minor instrumental motto (Ex. 1, i) at the *Alla Marcia funèbre* (Fig. 66). The irresolution of *Fathers*, lacking any hint of Christian redemption, anticipates Britten's late operas: synthesis is imminent, not achieved, and a concluding air of juxtaposition remains.

Indeed if the first stanza of Auden is *Wingrave*, the second stanza is *Venice* and Aschenbach, not least in the geographical and sexual allusions implied by 'his southern gestures modify':[57]

> Who nurtured in that fine tradition
> Predicted the result,
> Guessed love by nature suited to
> The intricate ways of guilt;
> That human company could so
> His southern gestures modify
> And make it his mature ambition
> To think no thought but ours,
> To hunger, work illegally,
> And be anonymous.

Summary

The assumption of the Wingrave family, as with most nations at war, is that God is on their side. What Britten again shows in *Wingrave* is that the behaviour and bigotry of the Wingrave family demonstrates that the Christian God cannot possibly be with them due to their complete failure to be Christ-like. Thus, as with the Borough in *Grimes*, the Loxfordians in *Herring*, Vere in *Budd* and Essex in *Gloriana*, the Wingraves wilfully refuse to

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[57] Fuller 1998:151; Mendelson 1981:214–16 and 1999:157, highlighting 'original sin' and the poems religious significance.

awaken from the sleep of unquestioning acceptance of their traditions. The tragedy is that Owen is able to find an independent conviction, but only as an end in itself:

> The point [of *Wingrave*] is that the true futility consists in the testing of courage for its own sake: perhaps even war is preferable to this?[58]

In the final analysis, Owen and the Wingraves are under the same Judgement, and in this respect they reflect the same quasi-convergence as Peter–Borough, Lucretia–Tarquinius, Vere–Claggart, Governess–Quint. The root of these symbioses is fear:

> The drama develops primarily along lines suggested by the idea that Owen secretly fears that he cannot escape the faults of his family – therefore, it is logical in the drama that he remain terrified by the ghosts despite his rejection of them, and if a logically defensible explanation for his death must be found, Owen dies of this fear. His fear of the ghosts is his fear of what they represent for him personally; they suggest to his inner consciousness that he, too, is subject to the forces that have driven his family to war for generations, in spite of his reasoned resistance. Thus, the distinction he tries to build up between himself and other members of his family is shown to be as false as the distinction between illusion and reality.[59]

Owen avoids as Lucretia had avoided, and her physical and spiritual suicide, from the 'Christianised' perspective of *Lucretia*, is prophetic of his. To borrow Owen's words, Lucretia, like the Wingrave ghosts, is his ancestor 'in every sense'. The development in *Wingrave* and *Venice* over *Lucretia* – especially poignant after the procession through the parable cycle – is Britten's removal of any attempt to redeem Owen's self-destructive choices in Christian terms.

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[58] Whittall 1982/90:250. This may be read as a development of glorifying 'suffering for sufferings sake' in the *Requiem*.
[59] Corse 1987:114–15.

> At the end, surely, [Owen] lacks the courage of his convictions: he is not certain that he is right, and so seeks to prove his courage by the sort of reckless deed which wins V[ictoria]. C[rosses]. He does violence to himself.[60]

Britten's establishment of Owen's difference of belief from both religious institutions and Biblical Christianity is absolutely crucial to the comprehension of the completely subjective nihilism of *Venice*, where Aschenbach is presented as one virtually isolated from public judgement, be it international and institutional (*War Requiem*) or domestic and familial (*Wingrave*).

However, it is precisely the simultaneous lack of internal cohesion of this philosophy – that it involves self-consuming practices rather than justification through an external objective truth – that results in spiritual and physical death. The only justification for this is aesthetic: the creation of the work of art it engenders.[61] With this in mind it is to Britten's final opera, *Death in Venice* that we now turn.

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[60] Whittall 1982/90:250.
[61] Keller 1973.239.

Chapter 11: *DEATH IN VENICE*: the end

Britten has a musical language for metaphysics at his disposal.[1]

Tadzio does not kill Aschenbach any more than the Wingraves kill Owen: both deaths are made inevitable by the doomed ones' realization of what separates him from what he desires most, and from the prevailing 'standards' of his time and place.[2]

Owen Wingrave establishes Britten's *credo* as a relocation of his engagement with Christianity into the aestheticised domain of 'musical grace' in which unrepentant states can, nonetheless, be 'redeemed' – the theme implicitly explored in his earlier operas. This musical bypassing of Biblical redemption, traversed through the Parable genre and redirected in Wingrave, enabled a new 'musical language for metaphysics' to emerge in *Death in Venice*.

Nonetheless, the philosophical origins of *Venice* lie in *Our Hunting Fathers*, centrally the setting 'Rats Away'. Both 'Rats' and *Venice* represent the infusion of sin into a Christian situation (Ex. 1, ii, a–b). Both involve heterophony related to the gamelan-derived techniques of *Grimes* (Interlude II), the canonic technique in the *Screw* (I.8, 'At Night') and the wordless choral outburst after Billy's death in *Budd*, *Noye*, the *Dream*, the Parables and *Wingrave* (centrally Owen's Peace Aria). Such connections are emphasized in Britten's motivic use of the major–minor third in the *Fathers* motto ('O pride so hostile to our charity') and the lethal Marvel–Plague–Love Motive

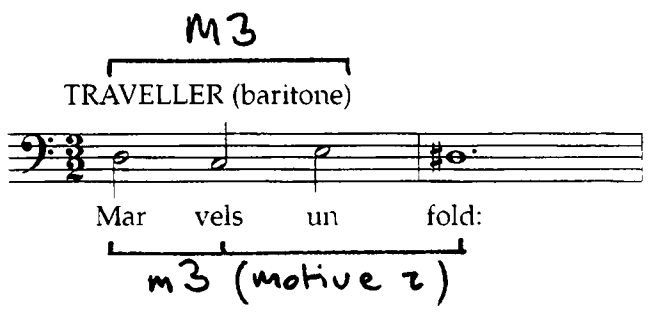
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[1] Mitchell (Palmer 1984:249). Kennedy 1981/93:239 observes 'Britten here was writing out his soul, in anguish.' Matthews (Mitchell 1987:156–57) has stated 'It is clear that Britten identified with Aschenbach, more closely, I suspect, than with any other of his operatic protagonists. One wonders if, when he was composing *Venice*, Britten imagined that he would share Aschenbach's fate.'

[2] Whittall 1982/90:260.

announced to the central character Gustav von Aschenbach in Munich by the Traveller. This Marvel Motive is only gradually revealed in its lethal manifestation as 'Love', later unmasked as the Plague (by the tuba, cf. Ex. 1, ii, b, cf. Ex. 1, i, b–c):[3]

Ex. 11, i. The Marvel–Plague–Love Motive



The fact that the Marvel–Plague–Love Motive is announced immediately after Aschenbach's rejection of Biblical statements in the Munich cemetery is crucial. (It will be remembered that *Fathers* was composed during Britten's break with the religion of his childhood.) In *Venice*, this Motive is associated with Dionysus, while the Tadzio Motive is associated with Apollo, until the orgy scene ('The Dream', II. 13), where the Tadzio Motive is shown to 'contain' Marvel-Plague–Love (Fig. 124, tuba):[4]

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[3] Evans 1979/96:534 accounts for the significance of the Marvel Motive, which he labels 'the x motif'. He summarizes Britten's use of the major–minor third, through *Fathers*, *Serenade*, and *Requiem*, as 'brightness dimmed'. Evans also shows (539), after the Mann scholar T. J. Reed, how Britten's use of Marvel–Plague–Love is 'psychological-cum-mythological [...] as well as [...] physical'. Also see Palmer (Reed 1995: 224–25), where the genealogy of Britten's use of the major–minor third is connected with the fictional composer Adrian Leverkühn's covenant with Satan in Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. Mann's tenuous linking of Leverkühn and Britten is of passing interest, as is the coincidence that Leverkühn's distinctive motive, B–E–A–E–E^{b} (if B is not the German reading of B^{b}) fits the Lydian mode on A (i.e. A–B–C#–D#/Eb–E), one of Britten's distinctive musical fingerprints (Prater 1995:405).

[4] Evans 1979/96:539 ff.

Ex. 11, ii. a. The Tadzio Motive (showing Locrian G#–A major tension)



Ex. 11, ii. b. The Hymn to Apollo



In this manner Britten reveals the failure of the Classical aesthetic as a redemptive 'possibility' without Christ. Apollo is ultimately not a sufficient symbol of Christ, containing the (semitonal) seeds of Dionysian self-destruction ('Original Sin') within itself.[5]

What is new in *Venice*, therefore, is the total independence of Britten's 'musical grace' from any conventional notions of Christian redemption in the text or drama.[6] Instead there is a heavy and explicit emphasis on the Classical paradigm, revelatory of Britten's earlier operas. It can be argued that the previous 'Christian' element is 'repressed' in the music to such a degree

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[5] McClary 1991:86, cited in Chapter 8, is useful in clarifying this situation: the Apollonian aesthetic is used to keep the Dionysian element from the recognition of the audience, so that 'the contagion will not spread'.

[6] Britten's comment to Perahia, 'I am a Christian in my music', was made at some point after their first meeting in 1972, i.e. during or after the period of composition of *Venice* (Dec. 1971–March 1973, Blyth 1981:172).

that it is no longer 'efficacious' as an element of the protagonist's salvation in any 'Christian' sense.[7]

a. Towards a Spiritual genealogy of *Venice*

To comprehend *Venice* as the touchstone for Britten's *oeuvre* its autobiographical nature must be negotiated (for Mann as much as Britten).[8] (Donald Mitchell confirmed that, after a private play through the opera by Britten at the piano, Britten turned and stated 'That is what Peter and I stand for!'[9])

In a development from *Budd* and the *Screw*, one experiences the drama of *Venice* exclusively through the verbal and musical sensibilities of Aschenbach from within the action.[10] There is no true discourse between 'public' and 'private'. His internal ruminations are only temporarily broken into by exchanges with the outside world – and even then they are mostly aesthetic projections and manifestations of his spiritual condition.

From a Christian perspective Aschenbach's spiritual death through an unregenerate resignation to Fate (Aschenbach: 'Let the gods do what they will with me'[11]) is disclosed as a musical confession: that the 'life' of the opera comes from an aesthetic source that ultimately remains passive–aggressive

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[7] Whittall (Reed 1995:297).
[8] Mitchell 1987:21. Also Mann 1929/54. Britten owned both of these editions. Piper additionally consulted T. J. Reed's Oxford edition of the German text (1971), which was also owned by Britten.
[9] Interview, Oxford, April 2000.
[10] Rupprecht 2001:245–47.
[11] 'The Dream', II.13, Fig. 287[13]; 'The Empty Beach' II.14–'The Hotel Barber's Shop', II.15, Fig. [1]292.

in relation to Christianity: 'It cannot be claimed that Britten is totally opposed to the Wagnerian view of Christianity as something which is anti-art'.[12]

On this aesthetic level, Britten shows how 'death' is both imminent and immanent in any number of combinations of the Apollonian–Dionysian dialectic, i.e. that inherent Classical (philosophical) dualism cannot be 'synthesized' independently of its fulfilment in the Word (*logos*) revealed as Christ in the Christian tradition, a tension Britten had explicitly explored in *Lucretia*. He had set Virgil's *Eclogue IV*, the so-called 'Messianic' Eclogue interpreted as prophetic of the fulfilment of this Classical hope in Christ, in *Voices for Today* (1965). Claggart's corruption of John 1:5 in his Act I aria of *Budd* becomes especially significant in this context where, Biblically, the Word is identified as 'the light' and 'the life of men' (John 1:4 cf. Claggart's 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and suffers'). Britten's regressive bypassing of Christianity in *Venice* in order to explicate and rationalize illicit desires according to the Classical paradigm ultimately admits death over life.[13] It is *Death*, not *Life, in Venice*.

In other words, 'integration' in *Venice* is accomplished according to the Classical (Greek) paradigm as opposed to the Christian, which would otherwise require the response of repentance.[14] Juxtaposition, not

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[12] Whittall 1974:299. Mitchell 1987:23 also discusses Brittten and Wagner. Palmer (Reed 1995: 213-27) deals with the significance of Wagner in the genealogy of *Venice*.

[13] Cf. Holloway (Palmer 1984:224).

[14] One of the primary distinctions between Classical Fate and Christian pre-destination is that, in the former, disembodied forces or 'Forms' ineluctably control destiny, whereas in the latter pre-destination is governed by choices made in response to a loving, personal God. That *Venice* has been described as Aschenbach's and Britten's 'Passion' perhaps indicates the final complete break that is made from adherence to Christ's Passion.

'wholeness', remains. It is, after all, no accident that serious art music has been indiscriminately deemed more or less 'Classical'. Aschenbach dwells spiritually in the world of ancient Greece. Britten's *Venice* (unlike Mann's) shows this to be accomplished by Aschenbach's conscious choice, not by the operation of a malign Classical Fate, although the latter becomes Aschenbach's rationalization once 'fatal' choices have been activated.[15] Aschenbach cannot, dare not, face the consequences of his spiritual choices (cf. Vere).

This is exampled by the Socratic dialogue with which Aschenbach's philosophical musings come to an end ('The last visit to Venice', II.16). Britten's employment of melodic versions of Owen Wingrave's Peace Chord in the harp and piano accompaniment to Aschenbach's reflections before his death retroactively tell us as much about Owen, as the citation at the head of this chapter indicates.

Similar configurations of the Peace Chord in the *gittern* accompaniment of the Ballad–Singer's recital of Essex's rebellion and betrayal of Elizabeth in *Gloriana* indicate a concealed pride and violence that applies to the failure of the Peace Chord to save Owen from his pride and violent death in the haunted room of Paramore:

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[15] Kennedy 1981/93:241.

Ex. 11, iii. Aschenbach's Socratic Dialogue (showing Peace Chord configurations)



Venice is itself symbolic of Aschenbach's spiritual disintegration:

> In the ingenuity of indulgence, in the varieties of vanity, Venice surpassed the cities of Christendom as of old she has surpassed them in fortitude and devotion; and as once the powers of Europe stood before her judgment-seat, to receive the decision of her justice, so now the youth of Europe assembled in the halls of her luxury, to learn from her the arts of delight.
>
> It is needless as it is painful to trace the steps of her final ruin. The ancient curse was upon her, the curse of the Cities of the Plain, 'Pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness'. By the inner burning of her own passions, as fatal as the fiery rain of Gomorrah, she was consumed from her place among the nations; and her ashes are choking the channels of the dead, salt sea.[16]

The very physical presence of Venice is a projection of Britten's spiritual concerns. His personal love of Venice as a kind of 'second home' to

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[16] Tanner 1992:124, quoting from Ruskin *The Stones of Venice*. The Biblical quotation is from Ezekiel 16:49 (KJV).

Aldeburgh, where he had composed a number of works including *Curlew River* and *The Prodigal Son*, is of secondary significance in these respects:

> [The] rapid oscillation between paradise and Inferno [is] suggestive [...] for *Venice*! Clearly Mann and Britten both seized on and each in his own way reappropriated this *topos* for each of their works.[17]

This exactly touches the Christian resonance behind – or beyond – *Venice*: it is imminent but never actually present, a distant memory rather than an actuality. At a stroke the rôle of Britten's last opera as the revelation – 'fearlessly towards the state of understanding *all*' – of an inevitably tragic finale to Britten's engagement with the Christian theme in his operatic *oeuvre* is rendered:[18]

> [Britten's *Venice*] does not resolve the conflict, and [...] Britten provides no redemptive message or reconciliation at all.[19]

These 'conflicts' are identified as a series of dualisms that can be summarized:[20]

Christendom	-	Cities of the Plain [Sodom and Gomorrah]
European	-	Asian
Art	-	Chaos
Apollo	-	Dionysus

Such can be viewed as extensions of Britten's earlier dualisms from *Fathers* on:

Charity	-	Pride
Life	-	Death etc.

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[17] Said (Reed 1995:272).
[18] Evans 1979/96:547.
[19] Said (Reed 1995:274).
[20] *Ibid.*:273–74.

These unresolved dualisms, musically embodied in Owen's Peace Aria, are extended and explicated in *Venice*: aesthetic dualism is finally revealed as a conceit because death has, in fact, already been chosen (i.e. the maintenance of an aesthetic dualism is a barricade against death, doomed because death is already in the aesthetic – the worm-within-the-rose to use Blake's phrase set by Britten in the *Serenade* 'Elegy' to the same major–minor third – though in E – at the heart of Marvel–Love–Plague, cf. Ex. I, i, a–b).

b. Gustav Von Aschenbach: 'Greek' versus 'Protestant'

The crux of the connection between Owen Wingrave and Aschenbach is expressed in his soliloquy (II.9, Fig. 234 *et seq.*):

> ASCHENBACH
> Gustav von Aschenbach, what is this path you have taken?
> What would your forefathers say, decent, stern men,
> in whose respectable name and under whose influence you,
> the artist made the life of art into a life of service,
> a hero's life of struggle and abstinence?
> Yes, but when heroes have flourished, Eros has flourished too.
> It was no shame to them to be enthralled, rather it brought them praise,
> it brought them honour.

In *Venice* the actions of Aschenbach's forebears are directly contrasted with his homoerotic musings. As in *Wingrave*, ancestral heterosexual Eros yields heroic acts of war – the secret meaning behind 'Paramore', hypocritically justifying illicit acts, a point first drawn by Britten against a Christian context in *Grimes*. The family Art of Paramore, in this sense, is Western, ostensibly stemming from The Great Tradition. Like Owen, Aschenbach rebels against this Great Tradition – even though its 'success', 'honour', 'self-discipline' and

'strength', have succoured his art as he acknowledges in his opening recitatives.

As has been shown in *Wingrave*, such words as 'glory', 'honour', 'strength', connote a moral and ethical quality extending beyond surface military virtues or respectable bourgeois conventionalism (cf. Billy's Darbies Aria in *Budd*). At an altogether deeper level they are linked with Biblical righteousness. This clearly becomes the moral dilemma in Aschenbach's mind. (A possible charge of blasphemy is sidestepped by Britten's manipulation of the 'military' surfaces of his operas as the apparent focus of his passive-aggression, militarism and institutional Christianity being connected in his mind from an early age.)

In *Venice* the 'Word', being central to Aschenbach's art and mode of communication, is shown to require redefinition, culminating in his 'Eros is in the Word' declaration. For Aschenbach, mere technical mastery of words has become inadequate:

> Aschenbach's tension arises from his compulsion to work and his Puritan mistrust of pleasure.[21]

The invocation of the Protestant work ethic and its connection with Puritanical ideas of ascetic denial and self-abnegation are significant in revealing the Christian element that *Venice* ultimately expels:

> [Mann's] skilful combination of symbolism and realism – the Greek element, from a world which regarded homosexuality as normal, ever more insistently present to Aschenbach as Tadzio personifies Eros, but repudiated by his puritan, Protestant nature – reflected the

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[21] Corse 1987:138.

> ambivalence within himself. (It was the nearest he ever came to public revelation of his tendency to inversion.)[22]

Aschenbach had a wife (deceased) and daughter, as Owen Wingrave had a fiancée. Yet beneath this social veneer a latent homoeroticism, the particular taboo Dionysian passion shown between *Wingrave* and *Venice* to lead to the protagonists' respective deaths, is the element to which they ultimately yield.[23]

Although the particularity of the sin had been sublimated in Britten's earlier operas to yield universal significance, in *Venice* it is germane. Through aesthetic knowledge, Aschenbach suffers a sudden and overwhelmingly powerful revelation in Venice that reduces his life, literally, to 'ashes' (a root word of his name). The 'Christianisations' that clearly mark the progression of Britten's operas up to *Venice*, most overtly in *Lucretia* and the 'translation in every sense' of *Curlew*, are shown in *Venice* to ultimately fail in their inability to shift the focus from the humanistic subject.[24]

The removal of this 'Christian consolation' is a further development of the nihilistic theme opened up by *Wingrave* in the aftermath of *Prodigal*, at a face value reading. The fact that in *Venice* there is 'no hint of Christian consolation' and that any attempt to rationalize a mode of redemption for Aschenbach can only be conducted at the aesthetic level without recourse to a

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[22] Prater 1995:89. 'Has there been any greater Protestant composer [than Britten] since Bach and Handel?' (Sams 1976:847).
[23] Whittall 1982/90:262, 'Some parallels do indeed exist between Wingave's determination and Aschenbach's enlightenment.'
[24] Britten (*OC*) 1967:15.

Christian explication over a Classical account. (This point might also apply to the finale of the Third Quartet, 'Serenissima', based on *Venice* themes.)

The relative banishment of the Christian element so relevant to the judgement narrative of Britten's earlier dramaturgies is revealed in Britten's close use of the orchestra in relation to Aschenbach's voice:

> Britten's score eschews the kind of orchestral narrative that constitutes a judging voice detached from Aschenbach's own.[25]

Through such musical means the important connection between physical and spiritual death, extending back through the operas to *Fathers*, is again shown to be an essential component to the 'parable' aspect of Britten's art. The collapsing of Aschenbach's public world into the private world of his psyche – a precise inversion of Elizabeth I in *Gloriana* – is accomplished by the stripping-out of the 'Christian' element and the extinguishing of a clear 'judging narrative'.

c. 'Eros is in the Word': Britten's metaphysical reconfiguration

From the outset of *Venice*, words and their power have already reached a low point in Aschenbach's evolution. The single pitch F in a morse-code-like rhythm on two clarinets that accompanies this opening disclosure of Aschenbach's may be taken to be the very moment where the 'new passion' the opera reveals is initiated. As in the *Dream* and *Wingrave*, the action begins precisely at the point of transformation, Britten being unconcerned directly

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[25] Rupprecht 2001:246, 283, 287–88.

with any 'pre-history', unlike Shakespeare, James and Mann respectively. All three operas commence with twelve-note propositions (as does the *Screw*, minus the Prologue added at a late stage, i.e. starting when orchestra enters with the *Screw* Theme).

The awakening of Aschenbach's subconscious is indicated by successive minor third A^{b} on muted horns, tritonal B on oboes and semitonal E on muted trombones, in relation to that opening F, inscribe a harmony that represents this tension with the glissando on harp (E–B; C–E^{b}), 'wildly thrashing about', reflect the animation of his passions (cf. the Tempter's harp from *Prodigal*). It has been argued how these opening harmonies and their later manifestations are related to Wagner's 'Tristan' chord, and in Britten's opera this is aurally illustrative of the illicit desires stirring within Aschenbach's subconscious:[26]

> ASCHENBACH
> I reject the words called forth by passion
> I suspect the easy judgement of the heart–
> now passion itself has left me and delight in fastidious choice.

Yet Aschenbach has not rejected – as his 'Tristan-like' opening harmonies reveal – rather, he has repressed. Repression has inevitably led to moral crisis, a theme passing back through all of Britten's protagonists. This crisis is implicitly predicated on whether to (Biblically) confess and repent, according to the apparent dictates of the Western *milieu* in which Aschenbach's former

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[26] Travis 1987:133 *et seq.* and Rupprecht 2001:249–50. The 'Tristan' chord had been literally quoted by Britten in *Herring* as Albert 'gets drunk', II.1, Fig. ^{6}19.

writings have been undertaken, or to unrepentantly yield to the repressed subject.

Britten's use of twelve-note propositions embodying both Wagnerian sensual passion (body) and the 'law' of the mind ('My mind beats on') serves as analogue of such tensions in *Venice*. Twelve-note propositions are rejected as Aschenbach disintegrates, replaced by a Locrian and major–minor (i.e. Ionian–Aeolian) modalism associated with Tadzio and the Venetian plague.

Aschenbach's choice – his conscious choice, unlike Mann's Aschenbach – is immediately demonstrated in his responses to Biblically-derived texts inscribed in the façade of the mortuary chapel (Fig. 9), the first inscription sung by an off-stage male chorus, the second by women:[27]

> CHORUS (Men)
> "They enter into the house of the Lord."
>
> ASCHENBACH
> Yes! From the black rectangular hole in the ground.
>
> CHORUS (Women)
> "May light everlasting shine upon them."
>
> ASCHENBACH
> Light everlasting? Would that the light of inspiration had not left me!

It is immediately upon this rejection of the Biblical element (Fig. 11) that Aschenbach sees the first of the Fate–Death characters, the Traveller, who is 'standing on the steps of the chapel.'[28] The combination of c minor and E major adumbrated in the Traveller's timpani figure are the same keys as those juxtaposed in the 'Pride-Charity' *Fathers* motto (cf. Ex. 1, i, a).

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[27] Mann 1928/1964:8.
[28] Production notes to *Venice* (1974).

The timpani figure also subtly hints at the Locrian G# that will be juxtaposed with A major in the Tadzio Motive. (Each of these Fate–Death characters: the Elderly Fop, Old Gondolier, Hotel Manager, Hotel Barber, Leader of the Strolling Players and the Voice of Dionysus are sung by a single bass–baritone.)

Ex. 11, iv. The Traveller's timpani figure (showing c and E)



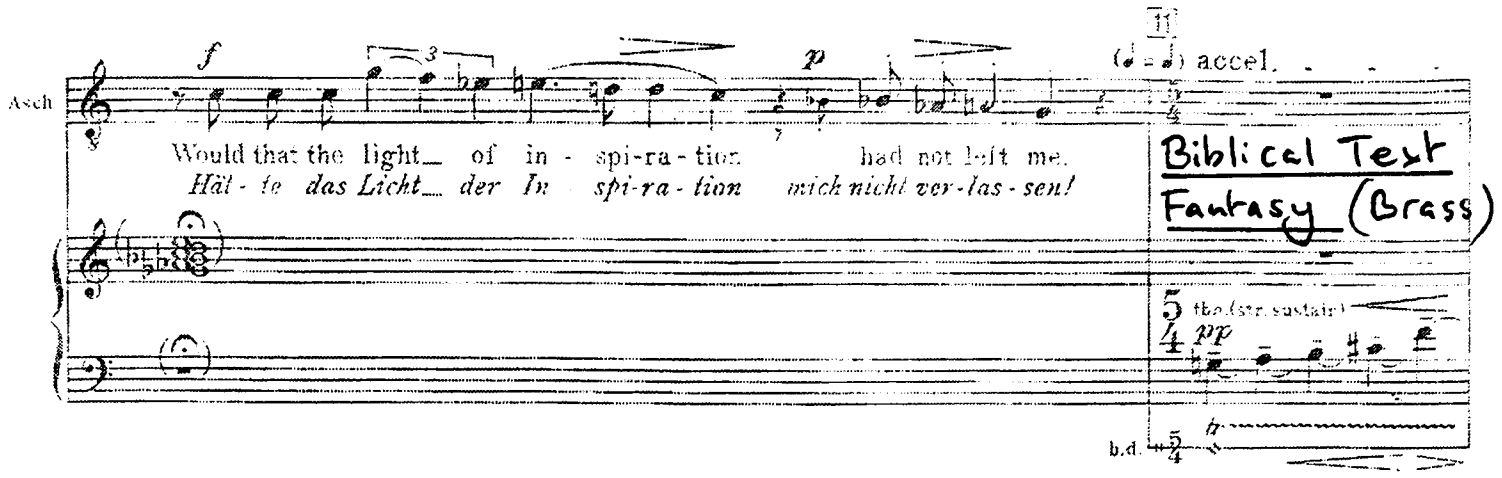
Mann's description of a 'mystical' element in Aschenbach's response to the Biblical inscriptions is retained in Britten's music that directly recalls the parable manner. Contrasted with the F of Aschenbach's earlier fretful

musings, the new bell sonority on F and off-stage mixed choral heterophonic 'blurring of the rising and falling sequences describing the inscriptions, two whole-tone hexachords embodying a twelve-note proposition, opens up a new mystical feeling:

Ex. 11, v. Biblically-derived inscriptions on the Chapel wall



Continued over



12 He is suddenly aware of the TRAVELLER standing on the steps of the chapel. They stare at each other.
Er wird plötzlich den REISENDEN gewahr, der auf den Stufen der Kapelle steht. Sie starren einander an.



Tadzio's 'gamelan' percussion orchestra – also requires 'bell' sounds, an evocation of bells in Venice that is clearly different from the 'real' chapel bell in Munich. As with the bell-scenes in earlier operas, Britten's apparent distinction between 'real' and 'evoked' bell sonorities is important to understanding a certain passive–aggressive dualism of spiritual feeling and relocation.

The Lydian quality of the Scriptural readings indicates the *diabolus in musica* that sensuously confirms the spiritual outcome of this short scene: Aschenbach's choosing to 'go south' on his rejection of Scripture is symbolic bodily as well as geographically (cf. *Fathers* 'Epilogue' as discussed in *Wingrave*). (The unfolding of chromatic instrumental lines and textures in the Parables from modal vocal–choral types musically indicates the presence of 'Eros in the Word' that can only be fully comprehended in view of *Venice*.) The subsequent polarity between 'sinful' Piazza and 'holy' San Marco, announced during the boat ride to Venice (I.2), reminds Aschenbach of the spiritual dilemma he has repressed, especially as this is initially shown by juxtaposing Aschenbach with the Fate–Death figure of the Elderly Fop that Aschenbach will mimic at the end of the opera (II.16, Figs. 299–301):

> ASCHENBACH
> Hurrah for the Piazza
> The pride of the city
> All hail to San Marco
> All hail to my beauty,
> "The pretty little darling don't you know."
> [Aschenbach sees the Polish family walking in front of him and starts distractedly following them.]

For Aschenbach, 'San Marco' becomes 'Tadzio', a translation reflected in the fusion of East and West in the music of the opera.[29]

In the subsequent 'Overture: Venice', Britten creates an aural analogue for the ambiguity of Venice as symbol of Aschenbach's state in the contrast between water and land. This is achieved by juxtaposing a 'watery' Barcarolle form of the seductive Serenissima Motive with the evocation of bells in the brass heterophony (Figs. 43–^{4}, 44–^{4}, and 45–^{4}, based on the later 'Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison' phrases of the scene in San Marco (II.9, Figs. 219–22) and the 'real' bells of San Marco itself (Figs. 43^{5}–4, 44^{5}-5, and 45^{5}-6). The 'phenomenal' and 'noumenal' aspect of bells again proving significant in a Britten bell-scene:

Ex. 11, vi, a. Serenissima Motive

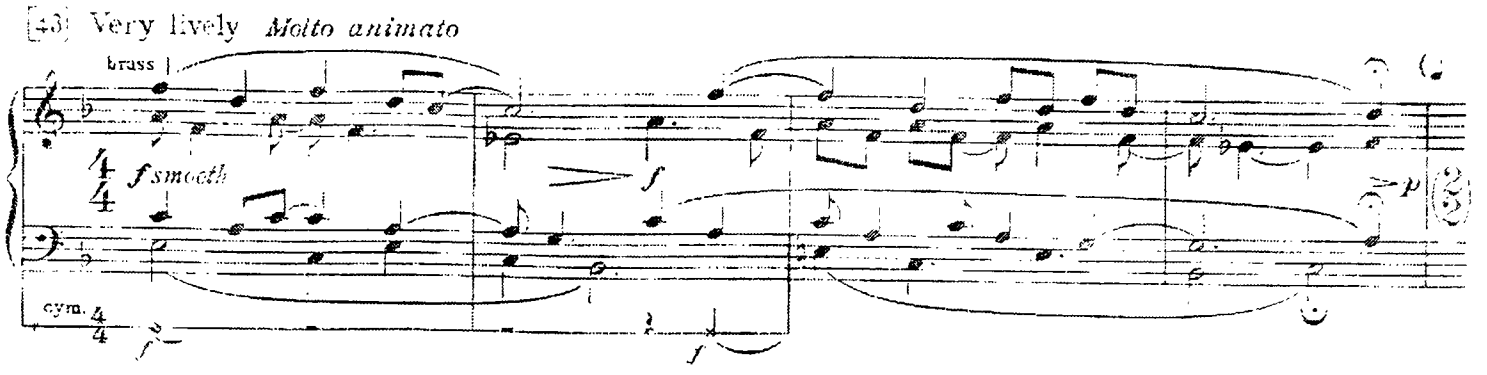


[29] Cooke 1998:220–44.

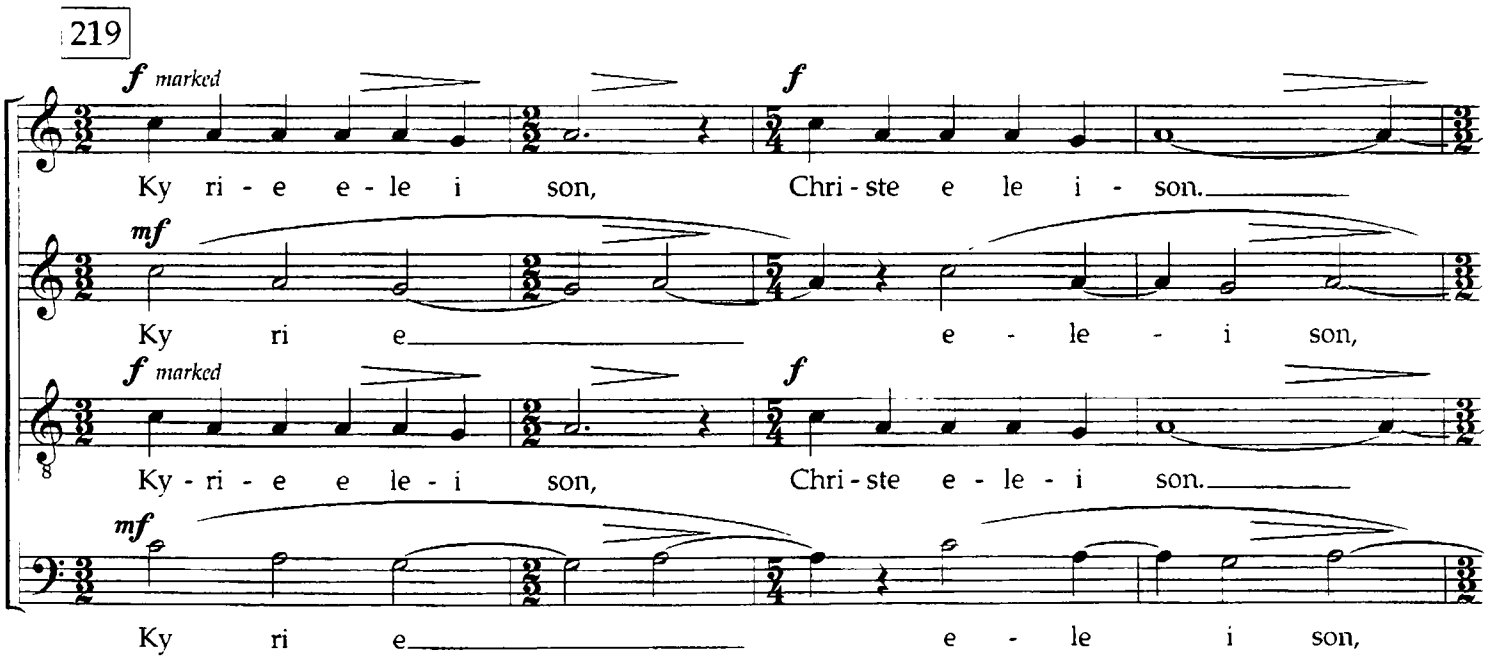
Ex. 11, vi, b. 'Barcarolle' form of Serenissima Motive



Ex. 11, vi, c. Heterophonic instrumental 'Kyrie eleison'



Ex. 11, vi, d. The later 'Kyrie eleison' phrases on which the San Marco brass heterophony is based.[30]



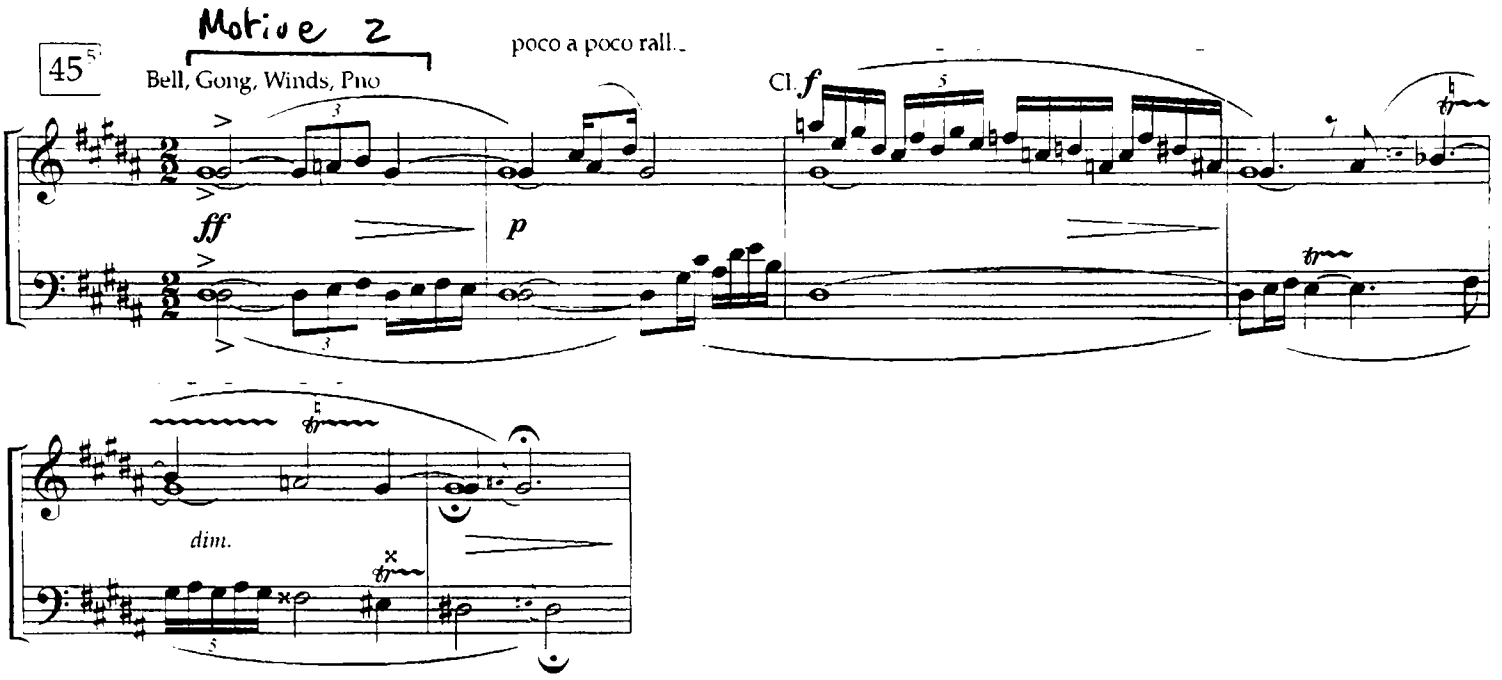
[30] Based on parts of the processional Greater and lesser Litanies for Rogation Days (Elliott 1997:22–23).

The sinister effect of the San Marco bells is enhanced by Britten's melodic use of a Motive *z* ostinato, and 'a nervous, "unravelling" gesture [Fig. 6]46], drawn out the decay of the last bell-tone, [which] quickly changes the mood and at the same time evokes very specific events – the unruly woodwind trills are a memory of Aschenbach's hallucination in Munich.'[31] The fourths in the woodwind 'unravelling' gesture may be related to the distinctive fourths of Aschenbach's 'a leaping, wild unrest, a deep desire!' (I.1, Fig. 1]8), where woodwind trills are consistently symbolic of the plagues insidious qualities (Claggart's fourths and the idea of the fourth as a 'moral perogative', whether for good or evil, is recalled). The effect of these trills is also felt in the accompaniment to the English Clerk's account (II.11, Fig. 265 *et seq.*), a segment which, as well as being an orchestral reprise of the Traveller's aria (I.1) also curiously recalls 'Essex is guilty' from *Gloriana* – the wind figures also distantly recalling the Cares of State Motive (Ex. 5, iv). Britten had also used trills as gestures connected with Billy's stammer in *Budd* and Miss Wingrave's music in *Wingrave*. The consistency of such gestures again indicates moral juxtapositions communicated at a deeply musical level in Britten's art:

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[31] Rupprecht 2001:264.

Ex. 11, viii. The 'real' bells of San Marco with 'unravelling' gesture



It is in the combination of such moments that the dramaturgical heritage of the parable cycle becomes evident:

> [*Venice*] becomes a story of the Pilgrim faced by the Tempter in different guises and the link there, with the church parables is obvious.[32]

What is made explicit in *Venice*, in relation to *Prodigal* (and this is where the 'quasi-anti-masque' relationship of the intervening *Wingrave* to the third parable is the essential pivot) is that the Devil–as–Death has the victory:[33]

> Nowhere does Mann suggest that [the composite bass–baritone roles] have supernatural powers, or that they are one and the same person, but he links them by endowing each with the snub nose and grin of death, and the broad-brimmed hat and staff of Hermes, conductor of the dead across the Styx.[34]

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[32] Greenfield 1973:28.

[33] In *Venice* the *Prodigal* roles are inverted: the bass–baritone Father (created by John Shirley-Quirk) becomes the Devil–Death figure (also written for Shirley-Quirk), whereas Pears' Tempter becomes Aschenbach. (This situation is mediated in *Wingrave* by Shirley-Quirk/Coyle and Pears/Sir Philip Wingrave, both different to Owen himself, but to varying degrees).

[34] Piper (cited White 1970/83:270).

This devilish victory is subtly infused during Aschenbach's arrival in Venice, as discussed, and is gradually manifest through his gradual abandonment of Christian morality:

> ASCHENBACH
> Ah Serenissima!
> Where should I come but to you
> To soothe and revive me
> Where but to you
> To live that magical life
> Between the sea and the city?
> What lies in wait for me here,
> Ambiguous Venice,
> Where water is married to stone
> And passion confuses the senses?
> I.3, 'The Journey to the Lido'

The overlapping equations implied here and throughout *Venice* have a long tradition in Britten's work (e.g. *Curlew, Noye, Budd* to *Grimes* and the *Bunyan* Prologue):

Land	-	Water
Apollo	-	Dionysus
Order	-	Chaos
San Marco	-	Lusting in the Piazza and the Venetian canals
Word (cognition)	-	Music (feeling)
Sense	-	Passion

What is clarified in *Venice* is the distinction of 'Word' from 'Music' at the point of departure between doctrine (cognition of necessary limitations) and emancipated sensuality (feeling) and the existence of Eros in the field between the two (cf. *Fathers* 'Prologue'). 'Eros is in the Word' Aschenbach exclaims in a

searing Locrian phrase identifying 'Eros' with Tadzio's Apollonian Motive ('The Games of Apollo', I.7, Fig. 183, Ex. 11, ii, b).

The rapid recession of Aschenbach's words into music throughout Act II – in contradistinction to his manifest wordiness in his Act I recitatives – indicates his dissolution into 'pure' sound in the orchestral epilogue at the *dénouement*. The basis of Aschenbach's recitative style in the model of Schütz's Passions and the recitative manner of *Lucretia*, with clear religious overtones, has secondary significance, indicating the gradual recession of Aschenbach's Christian heritage.[35] The specific connection between words and morals is cemented in Aschenbach's first segment of recitative (I.1, Fig. 23 *et seq.*):

> ASCHENBACH
> I have always kept a close watch over my development as a writer,
> Over my behaviour as a man.

'Eros' in *Venice*, 'that magical life/Between the sea and the city?', may be connected with what Britten elsewhere termed 'magic' or 'the unanalyzable aspect of music'.[36] For Aschenbach, the writer, this magic exists in the tension between 'Christianity–Apollo–Word' and 'passion–Dionysus–music' ('So longing passes back and forth between life and the mind' – in this sense 'life' meaning 'body' and 'mind', 'spirit'). What *Venice* demonstrates through Aschenbach's dream in which he tastes the sacrifice of Dionysus, is that real death is, in fact, spiritual. Permanent Death, without subsequent repentance,

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[35] The religious musical sources of the Catalyst Theme (Perotin's *Beata Viscera*) in the *Screw* and the Crownèd Rose Theme (Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus') in *Gloriana* have been noted.
[36] Britten 1964/78:17–18.

need only be enacted in an instant. In this sense Aschenbach re-enacts the Fall of Man in Eden, a Britten operatic theme from *Bunyan* on.

Aschenbach's choice of Dionysian 'sea' is sustained through an opening 'sea music' image, the View Theme, as Aschenbach views the beach from his hotel window for the first time, and its final irruption after Aschenbach's closing Socrates Aria in a brass fantasia and ensuing music of the Death–Fate figure of the Hotel Manager:[37]

Ex. 11, ix. The View Theme



The construction and association of the View Theme with chains of thirds relocates (or clarifies) the complex associations of 'sea = Ellen and the boy apprentice' in *Grimes* to a spiritual domain that may have resonance in

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[37] I.4, Fig. 59; II.16, Figs. 311-3; II.17, Fig. 316^{6} respectively.

Britten's biography (Ex. 2, vii, a, level 2).[38] This develops the original emphasis on the relationship between Peter and the boy in the evolution of the *Grimes* libretto that was transposed onto Ellen in the final version. The theatre in which this ultimate abandonment to sin is played-out in *Venice* is entirely interior (Aschenbach: 'When thought becomes feeling, feeling thought'). Both bodily and moral 'plague' spreads from the inside out:

> ASCHENBACH
> But what is self-possession?
> What is reason, moral sense,
> what is art itself compared to the rewards of chaos?
> The city's secret, desperate, disastrous, destroying, is my hope.
> I will not speak.
> What if all were dead, and only we two left alive.
> II.12 , Fig. 278

The final reference to Aschenbach's abandonment of Christian spirituality is a grotesque parody by the Strolling Players:

> GIRL
> I knew the Creed now I can't get started,
> BOY
> Can't say the Gloria nor l'Ave Maria,
> BOTH
> How shall I save my soul, l'anima mia? [...]
> BOY
> For you forgotten honour, work and duty,
> BOTH
> Carina, L'anima mia, how shall I save my soul?
> II.10, Figs. 240 and 242

(Words like 'Honour', 'Work' and 'Duty' again recall the mantras of the Wingrave clan.) Thus *Venice*, via *Wingrave*, is either 'anti-Church Parable' at a

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[38] Cf. Mitchell's connection of this *Grimes* music with Britten's experience of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, which can be connected with idea of the 'Eternal Feminine' (*das Ewig-Weibliche*) adumbrated in the text of Goethe's *Faust* (1985:604–5, fn. 23).

face value level, or a deeper revelation of the passive–aggressive level repressed within the Parable aesthetic itself.

d. The Voices of Apollo and Dionysus

Britten's later association of the bell sonority, the Chapel inscriptions, and the bells of San Marco with the Voice of Apollo are striking (II.13).[39] This lends credibility to a reading where Aschenbach's rejection of Apollo matches, in strictly Neo-Platonic terms, his rejection of Christianity. The bells sound the ambiguous Locrian $G^{\#}$–A major, identifying the Tadzio Motive on 'gamelan' bells, that will close the orchestral epilogue after Aschenbach's death. Again it would appear that the fields of religion and unrepentant sin are being merged in purely musical terms. The rejection of Apollo is a rejection of the ideal of Platonic love according to the Classical paradigm.

The explicit enactment of this unmasking and banishment of Apollo fulfils what has been implicitly present from the outset of *Venice*: Aschenbach's discovery that his achievement of Apollonian excellence in his art, without Christ at the centre, has not led to fulfilment in spite of resultant fame and honour. This element of 'confession' in *Venice* has tragic implications on the autobiographical level:

> [Britten phoned to tell me that he had composed the death of Aschenbach.] What struck me at the time of this brief phone call [...] was its necessity: this was an absolutely critical moment for the

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[39] Britten's use of the counter-tenor voice for Apollo makes for unavoidable connections with the rôle of Oberon – the boy-loving Fairy King – in the *Dream*. This connection is a further sonic clue to the immanent collapse of the Apollonian ideal without Christ at its centre.

> composer. [...] It was for me a singular experience, without precedent and never repeated. It brought home very vividly just how profoundly Britten was involved in the fate of his doomed hero.[40]

The conjunction of Fate and Death ('doomed') in the last sentence is striking in relation to the Fate–Death figure in *Venice*. Although Britten's last opera describes Aschenbach's Dionysian disintegration in relentlessly Apollonian terms, the very disclosure of imminent–immanent collapse or erasure at the core of (repressed) Apollonian aesthetics declares the composer's foreknowledge of a truth Aschenbach does not discover until it is too late.[41] Britten's own demise and death after *Venice* was completed is strikingly close to 'life reflecting art' in this respect (the works completed after the final opera being, more or less, 'commentaries', *Phaedra* even being a late 'confession' on the implicit religious truth behind *Lucretia*). Britten's Aschenbach is an aesthetic image of the 'god' who created him.

e. *Dénouement*: Death

The easy assignation of Aschenbach's resignation to Fate only to the manner of the Classical tradition overlooks Britten's clear presentation of Aschenbach's rejection of the Christian element via his rejection of the Biblically derived chapel inscriptions.[42] It is precisely this use of his freedom of choice that initiates his interaction with the Traveller and, thus, his

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[40] Mitchell 1987:17.
[41] The qualification made here on the autobiographical nature of *Venice* is that Aschenbach's disintegration and death takes place after his great body of art is completed (i.e. where the opera begins).
[42] Aschenbach's 'victimization' by Classical 'fate' is discussed in Evans 1979/96:526.

subsequent drift into a Classical fatalism that, as we have seen in other Britten contexts, can be a convenient mechanism for rationalizing sin in the Christian reading (e.g. *Lucretia*).

Aschenbach's physical demise at the *dénouement* is merely an outward projection of what has already taken place spiritually. Here, again, is a key to the spiritual deaths of Grimes, Lucretia, Herring, Vere, Essex, the Governess, and Owen Wingrave. The closing wordless music as Aschenbach breathes his last and Tadzio wanders out to sea fails to re-establish any sense of Christian redemption with which so many of Britten's other dramaturgies had wrestled:

> Though it ultimately achieves a unison with the violins' high A, a shake on $G^{\#}$ persists at the lowest extreme of this tenuous texture, so that the Locrian slant is never wholly abandoned and 'resolution', if glimpsed, is never savoured.[43]

> It is, after all, the great tragic irony at the heart of the triumphantly integrated music drama that is *Death in Venice* that Aschenbach's profession of faith in his 'Hymn to Apollo' leads him not to the fulfilment of love, but to a lonely death, with no hint of Christian consolation.[44]

The concluding association of this final $G^{\#}$ with the tuba sonority and register (the string basses, utilizing the 'plague' trill, acting as an extension) confirms the presence of the 'plague' *beyond* death. The Locrian tendency in Tadzio's theme is essential to comprehending the subtle slant Britten puts on his Apollonian A major to include the Plague Motive. The final polarization of

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[43] Evans (1979/96):545.
[44] Whittall (Reed 1995):297.

$G^{\#}$–A is enharmonically suggestive of the 'partnership' of Quint's A^{b} and the Governess' A in the *Screw dénouement*.

Additionally $G^{\#}$ is the pitch of Aschenbach's final incantation of the name 'Tadziù!' to a descending *portamento*, Britten's trademark indication of death, both spiritual and physical (e.g. *Bunyan* 'Christmas Party'; the death of John the boy apprentice in *Grimes*; Lady Rich's scream as the Queen signs her brother's death warrant in *Gloriana*; the unrepentant sinners of the temptation scene in *Prodigal*). Subsequently $G^{\#}$ against a tritonal D is present in the closing sound of the finale 'La Serenissima' (based on themes from *Venice*), of the Third Quartet. Neither Britten's final opera nor quartet brings the cumulative stratified tensions in each respective work into an affirmative statement. In this particular sense they stand at a polarized aesthetic position to the 'clear' B^{b} major triad that is symbolic of the unified whole the Father represents – that of the Christian God – in a face-value reading of *Prodigal*.

Ultimately Aschenbach dies because, as with former Britten protagonists, the wellsprings of inspiration in the Word, the spiritual element from a Christian perspective, has been replaced by a self-destructive, proud egotism. Self-centred Pride has finally triumphed over Other-centred Charity, and what 'may have been more generously recovered' – to paraphrase Auden – has been lost in death.[45]

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[45] Auden, 'Prologue', *Fathers*.

The key to understanding the conceit in Britten's Apollonian aesthetic as a formal device in his final opera lies in accepting that same lack of confession combined with repentance in Britten's earlier protagonists: that Britten is able to hold imminent aesthetic collapse in abeyance in the concluding orchestral Mahlerian *adagio* of *Venice* – the stylistic (Mahlerian) 'masking' may again be significant here – is no more redemptive in Christian terms of the Dionysian explosion Aschenbach experienced in his dream than the 'passive' aspects of the *dénouements* of *Grimes, Lucretia, Budd, Screw, War Requiem,* and *Wingrave* were able to redeem the shock waves of the violence in them. Indeed, it might even be claimed that Britten's aesthetics are, ultimately, a synthetic wall against repentance and Life from a Christian perspective.

Conclusion

Benjamin Britten – by his own later admission – was not a Christian. What has been labelled the 'Judgement rhetoric' in Britten's dramaturgical aesthetic, stems from the evidence that he carried the perspective of the 'innocent child' within himself as an adult. The political strategy in his work is simultaneously self-critiqued by the 'pure, untroubled' Christian faith of his childhood and youth.[1] This sensibility – 'the religious background of my conscience' – required repentance in those areas of sin, which were precisely the wellsprings of Britten's creativity from 1936 (*Our Hunting Fathers*, the Auden cycle recontextualising Britten's development to that point). The resulting conflict produced the dualities and polarities of Britten's aesthetic world.

These dualisms are analysable precisely through Britten's consistent use of musical techniques discussed in each operatic 'case study': e.g. the configuration of semitones (stress) and tones (release) in combinations of scales, modes and chromaticism (canker), incorporating twelve-note propositions; the relative stress and release of semitonal and whole-tone configurations across a range of intervals; the contrast of major-minor thirds, incorporating Motive *z* in the latter as a symbol of Original Sin; the symbolic use of keys related to the cycle of fifths in semitonal interactions to create

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[1] The use of the term 'political strategy' incorporates the idea that Britten's (and Auden's) political deviance during the 1930s was part of a wider social rebellion in which sexual deviance played a part e.g. Kildea (Cooke 1999:36-53). Quite clearly this is bound up with the composer's pacifism, expressed in strategies of passive-aggression in the parable techniques of his dramas (learned from Auden), as a component of his artistic social deviance.

states of moral 'dilemma' and choice; the use of triads to indicate 'love'; the use of the tritone to suggest the 'Devil' (often harmonically) in one sense or the 'accepted' (often melodically/Lydian) in another; the use of heterophony and orientally derived materials to suggest idealized but ultimately unattainable metaphysical states of being; the expressive use of instrumental colour and orchestration to suggest states of distress and judgement (e.g. often incorporating brass sonority) or freedom (e.g. often the harp). These techniques are concretely grounded in Britten's oft-stated belief in music as a 'language' that 'communicates certain ideas' (i.e. not just feelings and emotions).

Britten's simultaneous 'counter-protest' is a strategy of 'humility' (some might say 'irony'), a component of his 'Englishry' as a mode of negotiating compromise. That such postures of self-abasement project his message to the largest audience possible is technically realized in modes, gestures and the use of materials that will 'please'.[2] Britten's retention of traditional, even 'conservative', manners is absolutely germane to such methods of communication. However, the fact that almost all of his unrepentant protagonists suffer death of one kind or another goes well beyond any claim of a strategy conceding conventional expectations that an 'illicit' message is only acceptable if the 'illicit' messenger/carrier dies. The religious background of Britten's conscience dictated that spiritual death is the Divine

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[2] Britten 1964/78:17–18. *Bunyan* is an excellent example of this strategy in an alien culture, notwithstanding the operetta's 'failure' with American critics. (The Columbia University recording reveals a positive audience reception of the work.)

judgement upon the unrepentant sinner in general, manifested in his powerfully effective and resonant dramatic portrayals of physical death, culminating in *Death in Venice*.

However, the universal appeal of Britten's work cannot be explained only in this way. The lack of open specificity until *Venice* – Britten's aesthetic of ambiguous avoidance – enables the homosexual stratum to become an avatar for all spiritual death arising from unrepentant sin. It is in these universal respects that the constant passive-aggressive re-engagement of his music with the Christian theme enables his works to function as 'moralities'. The core sin here is not 'merely' sexual, but rather the unrepentant pride that ultimately stands behind all sin.

Britten claimed that, although he was not a Christian, his music was. The pacifism of the pre-Constantine Church was an influence behind Britten's 'total pacifist' stance. Britten's passive–aggressive advocacy of pacifism since the Auden period of the 1930s, through strategies attacking unrepentant religious hypocrisy culminating in *War Requiem* and *Owen Wingrave* after the spirit of *Grimes*, served as a prime means of appeal.

However the religious background to Britten's conscience would not permit ultimate affirmation of a message reliant on negative models of opposition. So long as other operatic characters were shown as unrepentant religious hypocrites, Britten's message was empowered. But, as Ellen Orford (*Grimes*), Collatinus (*Lucretia*), Billy (*Budd*), Elizabeth I (*Gloriana*), the Coyles (*Wingrave*) and the Christian model initially within the Governess (*Screw*) and

Aschenbach (*Venice*) demonstrate, there is a dilemma when real Christian qualities and convictions are demonstrably evident, and this is a component Britten repeatedly required of his librettists. The technical realization of these dilemmas has been the focus of the various analyses presented above, in the sheer consistency of Britten's *oeuvre*.

Wingrave, with its long gestation period and design for mainstream television viewing, is most articulate of this dilemma at a personal level: although Owen's convictions defeat the 'dead incubus' (to borrow Shaw's phrase) of Wingrave and 'Paramore' tradition from his perspective, the spirituality of the Peace Aria in which Owen believes is not the Truth, and so he must die (unlike a face-value reading of *The Prodigal Son*). The bleak ending clears the way for Aschenbach's outright rejection of Christianity and the 'open disclosure' along explicitly Classical lines in *Venice*. (The basis of the music of *Wingrave* and *Venice* in techniques developed through the Church Parables might argue for either a repression of the Christian stratum to the point of non-efficacy for Owen and Aschenbach respectively, or its complete relocation in the domain of 'guilty innocence' in which Britten's music acts as a substitute 'grace' or benediction as argued by Keller and Robertson.)

In light of Britten's final opera the true paradigm of all Britten's previous operatic 'redemptions' is disclosed, a point especially relevant to the explicit and controversial Christian–Classical juxtaposition in *Lucretia* and the repression of the Classical paradigm in the 'medievalisations' of *Noye's Fludde*

and the Church Parables. Only (neo-Renaissance) *Gloriana* stands out as a clear exception to this trend, and Elizabeth's successful 'repentance' finally propels her into the realm of pure speech, beyond the aesthetic world of Britten's musical 'language'.[3]

Britten's universality is in part accomplished through the way in which one can relate to his dilemma as a 'sinner', albeit in differing contexts. The resistance that one may experience to Britten's art as a Christian (who may or may not be a musicologist) resides in the manner in which Britten's music retains the tension – ultimately unrelieved because painfully comprehended – of the agnostic choosing not to repent.

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[3] As the final act of *Moses und Aron* had been beyond Arnold Schoenberg's.

APPENDIX 1: Britten's notes and references in Karl Young's *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford, 1933)

1. Britten's References (i.e. pencil markings in the margin):

Volume I:

Page	Reference
26	8. Sequence --> bottom.
82	'According to ...' (whole paragraph)
85	'The Mass' --> III
105	'The effect of these ...' --> '... representation.'
106	First half-page
214	Whole page
215	Whole page
216	Whole page
217	First paragraph down to '... introit'.
218	Last paragraph
219	First paragraph
229	Central paragraph
244	Last paragraph 'In...' --> '...sepulchre'.
250	First paragraph 'From...' --> '... chorus'.
252	First paragraph 'For...' --> '... Pax'.
282	Last sentence 'The arresting ... priest'
292	Penultimate sentence 'In ... apostles'
306	Last paragraph 'This ceremony ... appropriateness'
315	Central paragraph 'Although ... grave cloths'
323	First paragraph 'The share ... performance'
324	Last paragraph 'The sepulchre ...'
325	First paragraph 'Christ ist erstanden'
331	Penultimate paragraph 'A touch ... *Elevatio*'
365	Central two paragraphs 'The singing ... unity' [doubly lined]
455	Last paragraph 'As to ... Easter morning'
456	Last paragraph 'The office... --> (p. 457) second para. '... prayer.'
460	Last paragraph 'As in...' --> III.
463	First paragraph --> IV.
475	Last paragraph 'The arrangement ... --> (p. 475) second para. ... left.'
488	Central paragraph 'This dramatic ... flowers.'
489	Pentecost (first paragraph)

Volume II.

Page	Reference
8	Central paragraph 'The rubrics ... altaris.'
13	Last paragraph 'During ... --> (p. 14) ... Lauds.'
35	Last paragraph 'From ... coelorum.'
36	First paragraph 'This play ... competentibus.'
	Penultimate paragraph 'For so ... tradition.'
41	Sentence 'The attendants ... Moor'
42	Penultimate paragraph 'The dramatic ...' --> IV.
45	Whole page
52	Final paragraph 'As to... --> (p. 53) ... convenience.' VI.
83	Last paragraph 'It may .. --> (p. 84) V.
89	Last sentence 'The ... Epiphany play.'
91	Penultimate paragraph 'Concerning ... rejoicing.'
99	First paragraph 'Herod ... --> VII.
100	Second paragraph 'At Padua ... Star.'
116	Last paragraph 'Concerning ... --> (p. 117) IV.
150	Last sentence 'In its ... --> (p. 151) first para. ... specifically.'
195	First paragraph 'From the grim ... lacking.'
196	Whole page
223	Last paragraph 'For its lack ...' concluding p. 224.
227	Central paragraph 'According to ... cardinals.'
242	Last paragraph 'This astonishing ... ---> (p. 243 first three paragraphs) ... action.'
250	First paragraph 'This ceremony ... conception.'
264	Whole page
265	First paragraph --> ... liturgy.'
342	Middle sentence 'Although the robbers ... variety.'
399	Last paragraph 'As to ... sepulchrum.'
401	Last paragraph 'For information ... --> (p. 402 first para.) ... pyxes.'
403	Second paragraph 'As to the status ... performances.'

2. Britten's Notes (i.e. specific designations given by Britten to subjects referenced):

Volume 1:

Page	Notes
76	Hymns for special festivals
82	Officiant representing character
104	Clerical revels -- parodies
214	Characters -- 3 Mary's
215	Positions around altar
218	Altars and tombs
229	Setting of 3 Mary
244	Boys and Angels
250	Costume, gestures
252	Costume, gestures
282	Single priest sings [3] Marys
292	Actors not dressed
306	Boys playing Marys
315	2 Canons -- Peter -- John
320/23	Congregational participation
324	Casting of parts (boys)
330	'Limping gait' for Peter
335	Men -- Women -- parts
364/65	Chorus interjection
365	Casting
384	Casting (women)
455	Mise en scène
456	Hymns and Procession
460	Costumes
463	Costumes and gestures
475/76	Costumes and props
484/88/90	Scenic tricks
489	Incense
507/12	Gestures
536	Where played

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Volume One consists of three main sections:

1. The liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, the Mass and the Canonical Office.

2. The dramatic and other literary aspects of the Roman liturgy including discussion of the burial of the cross and host, the harrowing of hell, and literary embellishments (tropes).

3. The development of the dramatised Easter tropes, and 'plays' associated with the Resurrection and Passion.

Volume Two is in two sections:

1. Plays associated with the Nativity (the shepherds, the Magi, the Slaughter of the Innocents, the Procession of Prophets, and other Christmas plays).

2. Plays about other subjects from the bible and from legend.

APPENDIX 2: Interviews with Leslie Brown

In early 1999 the author interviewed Leslie Brown.[1] Brown had been the Bishop of Ipswich and St Edmundsbury, in which capacity he had made annual addresses at the later Aldeburgh Festivals during Britten's life, and had visited him in hospital during 1968. The desire to track the Bishop down was prompted by several biographical incongruities that seemed to exist over details surrounding his involvement in the final weeks of Britten's life.[2] Leslie Brown died not long after these interviews were given.

a. Three telephone conversations (23 February and14 May 1999)

Leslie Brown:

• 'I received the impression that Ben was trying to mask himself. [This is later qualified: 'This may be because his relationship with Peter made him feel that he could not relate to Church life, and so he masked his religious feelings and instincts. Most of Ben's colleagues did not think that Ben believed. I did.'] Ben did not give the impression of believing in the Trinity. There was no death-bed repentance of any kind. Initially, five weeks before his death, he was unwilling to receive communion. Then I received a phone call from his secretary [possibly Rita Thomson] saying that it would be good for me to go over to the Red House and take communion with him. We did that four or five times before he died.[3] On the last occasion I saw him, and said the blessing, I was packing up my things. I got to the door and I asked "Is all well Ben?" He took me, and kissed me full and hard on the lips, as was his custom and said "How could it not be with those wonderful words in my ears!"[4]

• 'When I talked with Ben he was aware, when composing, of being taken out of himself and writing down what he was given. I said I thought that was God the Holy Spirit. Ben didn't comment.'

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[1] The interview was given at Meadowmead Nursing Home on 24 Feb., 10.30 to 11.30 a.m. The interview is recorded and in the author's collection.

[2] Elliott 1985:22; [Beth] Britten 1986:200 and Carpenter 1992:583.

[3] *Pace* Carpenter 1992:585, who reports 'once'.

[4] See Carpenter 1992:583. Brown admitted that Britten's kissing initially made him feel very uncomfortable until he accepted it as Britten's habit.

b. An interview

According to the Brown (*pace* Carpenter 1992:583), it was not 'prayers for the dying' that he read out to Britten, but simply (and less dramatically) the Communion service from the prayer-book. As Brown explained:[5]

> **I did nothing confessional.**
>
> No.
>
> **So apart from that?**
>
> So there were not any final benedictions, as it were, or anything of that nature?
>
> **No. Well, as you know there is the benediction at the end of the Communion 'And the peace of God which passes all understanding' and the blessing, and that's the end of it.**
>
> So that's what [Britten] was really referring to on the last occasion by 'How can it not be with those wonderful words ringing in my ears?'[6]
>
> **Yes.**
>
> One of the things that intrigued me about the conversation we had yesterday is that in the research I've been doing, the distance that you described yourself in the relationship he had with Peter Pears to his view of the Church and the difficulty in his own mind of his relationship to the Church is something that I think you can actually hear in his religious music.
>
> **As far as Christianity went the word that really characterizes Ben is 'reticent'. That word really sums it up: he was very reticent about it all, and he didn't want people to know what he was really thinking or feeling. That was the impression I got.**
>
> Now if that's true, should we conclude that there was, in your opinion, some element of devotion within him at some level?

---

[5] Brown in bold text. Since the early 1980s Brown has been almost blind, and so had not had previous opportunity to read Carpenter and Beth Britten, an opportunity corrected by reading the relevant extracts to him during the interviews.

[6] Vere, thinking of Billy at the end of his life in *Budd*, recites the modified version of the Benediction: 'But he has saved me, and blessed me, and the love that passes understanding has come to me.' This irony, unknown to the Bishop, would surely not have been lost on Britten.

Well devotion without expression, really, apart from his music. Well, the answer's quite clear: according to the Christian tradition, he was living in sin and he couldn't bring himself to break all that up because that was his very life! I mean, him and Peter had a relationship – husband and wife really. I didn't say anything about that [to Britten] at all, at any time. Perhaps I ought to have done. I wonder if I failed in my duty! But I didn't *[long pause]* **he was** *such* **a good man, and so** *[very long pause]*

When you said that you feel you may have failed in your duty in reference to Britten's having been living in sin; in taking the Communion, and with the funeral address also did you view your role ... in effect did you resign yourself to the fact that Britten wasn't going to repent as such, and did you see your role as a consolatory one?

I saw my role as a friend, whom he trusted. I mean, for example, when I had been there [as Bishop of Ipswich] for a bit he wrote to me -- I had met him somewhere -- and then he wrote to me and said 'Now that you have come I would like to revive the service before the Festival, which we always used to have, before the Aldeburgh Festival which was dropped, and would you please preach at it?' And I did that for about four years. And every time I got a letter asking me to do it and every time I got a *very nice* **note thanking me for what I said. And he obviously felt that I was a friend and not a judge. That was the whole basis of it, really.**

Beth Britten quotes a big chunk of your final address concluding with the Bunyan quote, but presumably, by that, you meant that, in your funeral address, you didn't mean a Christian heaven as such.

Oh, I wasn't thinking that, in any sort of detail, I just meant that I thought Ben was a wonderful person and the Lord would not refuse him --I wasn't putting myself in the position of a sort-of judge saying: 'Oh you shouldn't do this or that'.

No. I mean the Scriptures are very clear on the particular sins Britten was involved in of course.

Yes.

I suppose you feel it put you in a difficult position because you felt you could not act as a judge but also you cannot seem to be approving in any way.

No! No it is a difficult thing. That is a point. I don't think anybody thought I was approving -- they all knew me by then -- I don't think they did! and everybody knew that I was very close to Ben.

So you felt that people were able to make that distinction without your saying so? Don't you think that these things are quite important? There are some people who talk of Britten being a Christian and would maintain Britten died a Christian. Don't you feel that, by not clarifying your position, you may have run the risk of being condemned by what you approve?[7] I take it that you were not in any way taking an approving stance?

***Certainly not!* No, I was *ignoring* that as not my business to judge. Perhaps when I said 'I don't know if I failed in my duty' I meant *should* I have been a judge?! I wasn't!**

Because probably you could represent the Scriptures, it doesn't have to be your judgement more that you are a vessel through which what the Scriptures are saying [can pass]...

Right!

Is that what you mean?

Yes.

When I read to the Bishop the passage in Carpenter quoting Pears, who stated that Britten had only taken these final communions to keep the Bishop happy, his surprising response was: 'Well, he could have done. He was very fond of me.'

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[7] Cf. Romans 14:22.

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INTERVIEWS

John Evans	London	20 July 1993
Philip Brett	California	1 October 1993
David Matthews	Aldeburgh	14 July 1994
Philip Reed	Aldeburgh	15 July 1994
Rosamund Strode	Aldeburgh	15 July 1994
Donald Mitchell	Aldeburgh Oxford (St Peter's) Cambridge (King's)	16 July 1994 April 2000 June 2003
Colin Matthews	Aldeburgh	17 July 1994
Robert Saxton	Aldeburgh	17 July 1994
Rev. Charles Coleman	Telephone	16 March 1995
George Malcolm	Telephone	18 March 1995
Russell Oberlin	New York	10 February 1995
Gordon Meyer	New York	8 February 1995
Humphrey Carpenter	Oxford	1996
Myfanwy Piper	Fawley Bottom	1995/6
Basil Coleman	London New York Ewing, NJ	1995/6/7/8/9/2000/1/2 6 December 2002 7 December 2002
Leslie Brown (Bishop)	Hindhead	22/23 February 1999
Anne Surfling	Aldeburgh	August 2000
Ray Minshull	Telephone	August 2000
Prof. Edward Mendelson	New York	August 2001
Theodor Uppman	New York	6 December 2002